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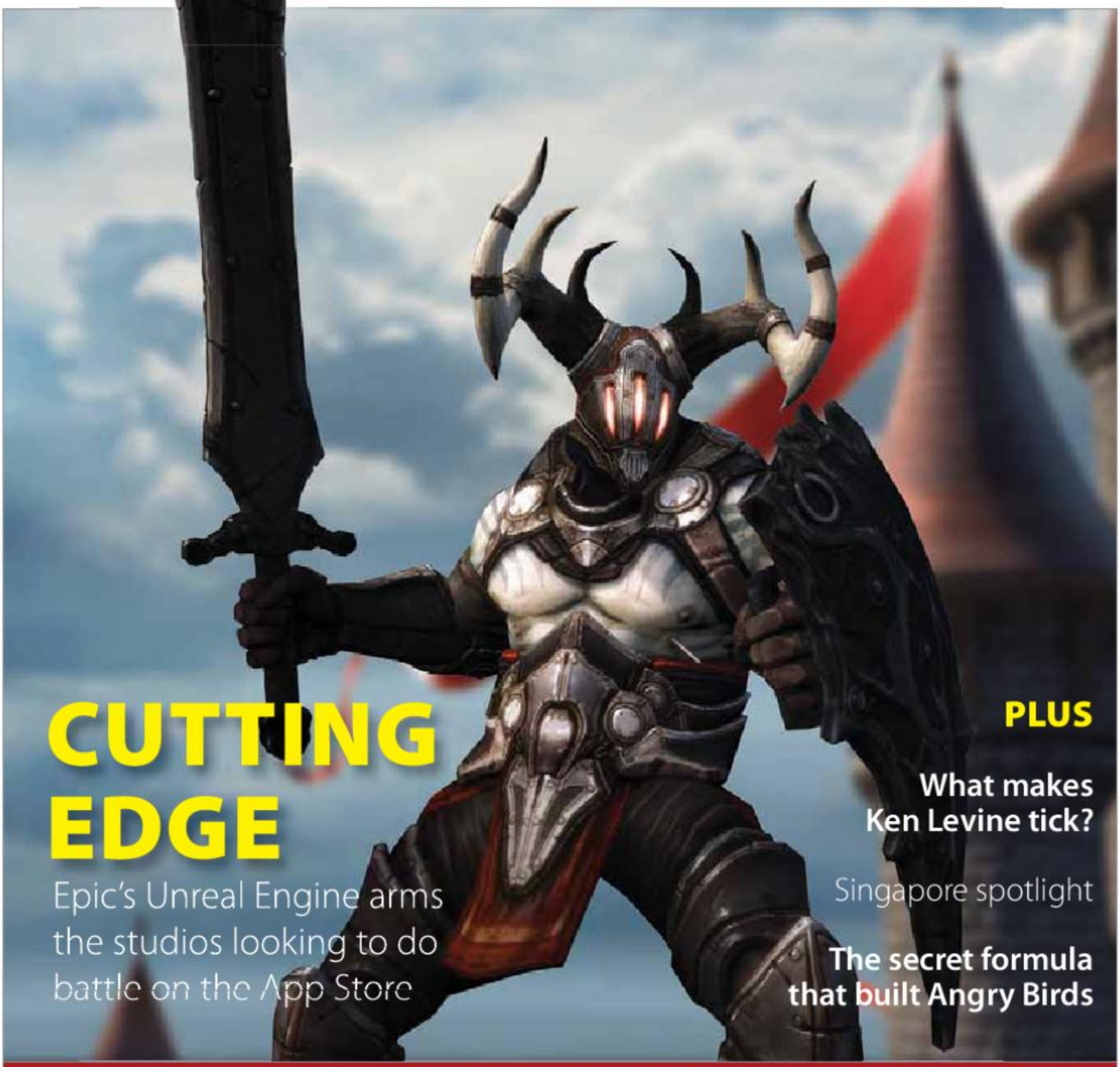

CUTTING EDGE

Epic's Unreal Engine arms the studios looking to do battle on the App Store

PLUS

What makes Ken Levine tick?

Singapore spotlight

The secret formula that built Angry Birds

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ALPHA
ADVENTURES IN GAMES DEVELOPMENT: NEWS, VIEWS & MORE

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Livingstone seeks support for industry skills survey

NESTA and Skillset's review aims to hammer home proof that games are a key UK employer for graduate talent

by Will Freeman

Eidos life president Ian Livingstone has made an appeal for developers to take part in an ambitious skills survey that hopes to show the massive value of games industry employment.

The independent Review of Skill for the Video Games Industry is being handled by NESTA in collaboration with Skillset, and has been designed to position the sector as a valued employer and hotbed for games production talent.

The initiative sets out not just to engage with the Government, but also with teachers, parents and young people, with the ultimate goal of raising the visibility of the UK industry on the global stage, and establishing the country as a destination for graduates and talent.

"If we are going to convince [the Government and public] to change the way our education system operates, we need to make as robust a case as we can," said Livingstone in an open letter to the games industry published exclusively on www.develop-online.net.

"In order to achieve this," he added, "we have tasked our team at NESTA with an ambitious programme to get under the skin of the problem, and to gather a robust evidence base on the whole of the talent pipeline, from schools and into universities and the industry."

Following a request from Culture Minister Ed Vaizey, the review hopes to attract input from every facet of the UK games industry, including employers and staff. While employers are to be contacted directly by Livingstone, those employed can visit the official survey website skillsforgames.com. It is hoped that those developers currently out of work will also be contributing, so as to represent as broad a range of sector voices as possible.

> ***"We will be working hard to deliver a blueprint for change."***
> Ian Livingstone

"We will be reporting in the New Year," confirmed Livingstone in his letter.

"Until then, we will be working hard to deliver a blueprint for change in the UK's educational system, so that our companies can access the kind of talent they need to stay on top, creatively and commercially. Please help us to accomplish this with your participation in our surveys.

If successful in its goals, the survey could do much to counter the famed 'brain drain' drawing UK talent away to international hubs of the likes of Canada.

www.skillsforgames.com

Editorial

Stop. Collaborate. Listen.

THERE'S A LOT of talk amongst developers about the haven of self-publishing and how it will lead to the destruction of cash rich publishers. It's easy to see why – online distribution platforms have helped a number of studios realise that long-held dream of getting a game to market on your own.

But a lot this talk is complete guff.

Yes, the new routes to market have blossomed like a flower, but that hasn't necessarily meant the publishers have gone away. If anything, they've muscled into these markets quicker than even the nimblest studios.

Just look at Xbox Live Arcade: already a controlled system thanks to Microsoft's role as gatekeeper, it is now overcrowded and densely packed with games that were nannied into existence by publishers. It's so busy Microsoft is having to create crude promotions like 'Summer of Arcade' and 'Game Feast' that highlight the better games – and all the while Xbox Live Indie Games exists as some kind of ghetto to keep the microteams at bay.

And the App Store? It's a beacon of creativity and a megaphone sputtering out a white noise of apps. The designs of a company like Epic on that space will only enhance that.

It's the same across physical and the more open online PC sales channels, too. Distribution, whether digital or physical, becomes more complicated and naturally (or unnaturally, depending on your point of view) favours big spenders.

So I can't think of anything worse than companies trying to shut themselves off from the potential partners under their noses (some rich in knowledge, some just rich, some both), and trying to go it alone. It's a recipe for disaster.

Even the companies that have made it through on their own know that doesn't always make sense. Moshi Monsters, for instance, acknowledges that it can't build a DS team in house for its console play, but will work with a partner. Or Ninja Theory (p21) – a studio which has long talked up its ambition to own its own IP but hasn't ever managed to forge the deal to do so.

It's blasphemy to say it, but development doesn't always have to be about pioneering on your own – sometimes the best stuff comes from collaboration, not obliteration.

Michael French
michael.french@intentmedia.co.uk

'We're taking the

You don't need to be an American media giant to create the world's

by Michael French

THE COLLAPSE OF Realtime Worlds may have cast doubt over the UK's ability to build online games businesses – but British firms can be pioneers on the digital frontier, says London studio Mind Candy.

And it's got the stats to prove it.

The studio is responsible for kids' virtual pet and online game *Moshi Monsters*, one of the fastest growing sites in the world. In just two years it has secured over 27m users from ages four up to 14 in the UK, USA and Australia/NZ.

Mind Candy's in-house research claims 1 in 3 UK children have designed their own character in-game.

The stats came as the firm revealed an aggressive plan to further boost its business by co-producing books and other merchandise based on the Moshi brand, and self-funding a move into publishing games for Nintendo DS and 3DS.

Moshi will become "one of the biggest entertainment properties in the world" said CEO Michael Acton Smith – while at the same time changing perceptions about the entrepreneurial power of British game studios.

"We're taking the fight to Silicon Valley," he told *Develop*, adding that by moving into its own books and console games the firm is "disrupting a lot of industries – games, toys, licensing".

Smith specifically wants to prove *Moshi Monsters'* young audience that games are still an exciting business, and inspire the potential games business men of tomorrow.

"I have spoken at a number of schools since Moshi became so popular and think there is a real case to be made about educating children about being an entrepreneur, and having a career doing something you are passionate about, like games.

"We need more role models for the businessmen of tomorrow – at the moment we have Richard Branson and a few Dragons. That's not good enough."

Smith also said that the UK needs to develop a healthier attitude to the ups and downs of business – and start courting a more proactive investment community like the one found in the US.

"There's a different culture in the US," he said. "There are different circumstances that unfortunately mean over here the new IP, the good new IP, doesn't always bubble to the surface.

"And also in the UK the failure culture is so different. In America if you form a company, and it fails or its product doesn't work, then you move on, without shame.

fight to Silicon Valley'

most popular online games properties – just ask London studio Mind Candy

Mind Candy is preparing to expand its online game with a number of goodies sold at retail, such as this gift pack

"Failure is no big deal. The American Dream is to try and try again to achieve your goal. In the UK, doing that is almost taboo."

It's a telling remark when the UK development scene is still reeling from the collapse of Dundee outfit Realtime Worlds, which burnt through over $100m investor cash in the road to build its ambitious MMO *APB*, went into administration less than two months after the much-delayed game finally made it onto the market.

Smith said that such nightmare stories don't help investor confidence – and were a warning for every developer out there.

"Hindsight is a great thing when commenting on something as sad as the Realtime Worlds situation – but I think it's clear that overspending and a delay in release is the pitfall for online games. You do yourself lots of favours if you release quick and early and refine along the way. Investors like that these days."

Smith is all too familiar with investor reluctance. Mind Candy built the Moshi empire with just the $1m left over from the firm's over-ambitious Perplex City alternate-reality game – and next to no support from the traditional games industry.

"For us if we had no cash left after Perplex City we would have been laughed away for good," said Smith.

"We have felt a bit unloved by the games industry – but in the last 12 months something has changed, and I think it's clear the industry is approaching online much more head on and openly.

"But I guess they're going to do that when a company like Zynga can appear out of nowhere and make $100m dollars very quickly."

www.mindcandy.com

> ***"We need more business role models for the studios of tomorrow – at the moment we have Richard Branson and a few Dragons. That's not good enough."***
>
> Michael Acton Smith

POCKET MONSTERS

Mind Candy is shying away from working with a traditional publisher as it turns to producing its own DS games.

The firm had originally pursued a traditional licensing deal with a publisher – "but the model didn't look right to us".

"We saw the success of *Club Penguin* and thought Why not? We're not going to spend years doing it, we think we can do it relatively quickly.

"Initially we spoke to publishers. But we started to rethink it when we saw the numbers. It wasn't worth our while to licence it out. Instead we can publish it ourselves, and find a distributor who can take a small cut, and have much more control over the product – and much more input in its creation.

"We want to really be a part of making Moshi work on DS – it's a really important format to our young players; the most asked question they put to us is 'When is the DS game coming out?'

"And why farm that out to a publisher when we are already experts in marketing and have lots of game development experience already?"

Instead, Mind Candy wants to closely manage and control the production of the game itself, and make it consistent with the online world, so that the portable game links back to it through offline play.

"We want something really decent that is linked closely to the Moshi site – and *Pokémon* is the obvious comparison to the kind of market we want to appeal to."

ANATOMY OF A BLOCKBUSTER

A new monthly dissection of a recent hit game...

Just Dance

PUBLISHER: Ubisoft

STUDIO: Ubisoft Paris

FORMAT: Wii

PRICE: £29.99

www.ubisoftgroup.com

THE SENSATION

At a time when the public and media were obsessed by *Modern Warfare 2*, few were paying mind to *Just Dance*. Placed at 100 in the All Formats sales charts in its first week of release, it looked like something of a non-event for developer Ubisoft Paris.

Then, something happened, and within six weeks it had taken the number three slot, and was showing no signs of stopping. A bat of the eyelid, and *Just Dance* did the unthinkable, and stole the number one spot from Infinity Ward's giant of hype and marketing spend. *Modern Warfare 2* had met its match – and it happened on the dancefloor.

THE GAME

A Wii exclusive, *Just Dance* has become a stalwart game for the competitive post-pub clique. Its concept is simple; it offers a collection of popular music new and old and turns the player's entire body into the rhythm action controller. The game actually began life when its creative director Gregoire Spillmann spotted a minigame in a *Raving Rabbids* Wii release that he realised had potential as a full boxed title.

Something of prelude to Kinect and Move, Just Dance has proved that with the right implementation, the Wii remote can deliver surprisingly accurate, convincing results.

It has also spawned a sequel, due out in the middle of this month.

THE STUDIO

Founded in the capital of its parent company's home nation, Ubisoft Paris is most famous for *Rayman Raving Rabbids 2*, *Red Steel*, *Red Steel 2*, and *XIII*. It is currently at work on the forthcoming Michael Jackson game for Wii.

UNIQUE SELLING POINT

At launch it wasn't the first dance game, but while the likes of *Dance Dance Revolution* required unfurling a plastic matt or trip to the arcade, Ubisoft's effort simply demands one Wii Remote per player. At a time when expensive peripherals were the last barrier to entry for rhythm action – Rock Band being a case in point – *Just Dance* offers an affordable, space saving alternative.

WHY IT WORKS

Fundamentally, *Just Dance* was a quality product well targeted. Despite some observer's assumptions that many Wii's have been left to gather dust, and the family audience's fate as the demographic relegated to endure endless party game compendiums, Ubisoft Paris' creation proved that with the right product there was still a huge audience eager to buy games. It was no secret that Ubisoft was surprised by the game's success, and if anything *Just Dance's* stealth attack on the charts also proved the value of word of mouth.

It thrived because it made for good conversation the following day. Gone are the days when non-gamers' experiences with an arm-waving minigaming release hold much value as novel water cooler currency, but "that night we all danced to Deee-lite's Groove Is In The Heart and Simon fell over the sofa"; that's going to get people down the shops in their lunch break.

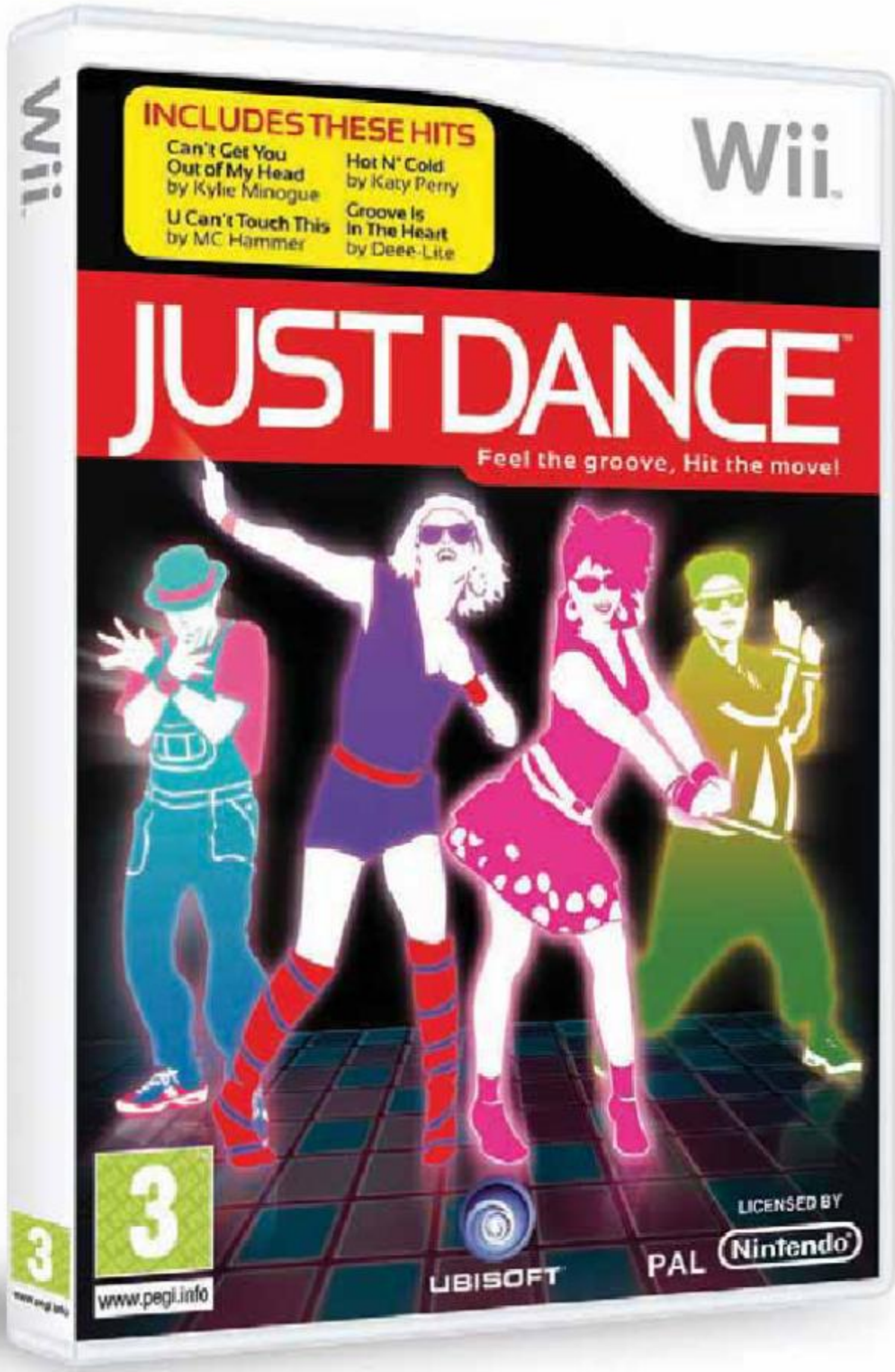
TRY IT YOURSELF

Don't patronise the casual gamer. Their penchant for accessibility and family friendly chuckles doesn't mean they don't have taste and standards. Just because they haven't played *Psychonauts* and *Rez* doesn't imply they can't spot a *Wii Sports* clone in an instant.

They crave laughter, and the fact is that the same old jokes wear thin fast. They also want novelty, but that doesn't mean you need to obsess over originality. Just give them what they want to do in a new way.

It's no more a coincidence that *Just Dance* triumphed at a time when dance acts were dominating TV talent shows than it is that the life of a dancer is an aspirational one at present. There's a wealth of desirable lifestyles and activities out there that wouldn't ask too much of the consumer looking to play out their day dreams in the living room, and many of them remain largely untouched by developers. It's a fact 'movie karaoke' title *Yoostar 2* – which lets player talk along with favourite scenes – is banking on.

Finally, look to your back catalogue, and bear in mind that Spillmann's observation about *Raving Rabbids* was the spark that lead to the moment *Just Dance* toppled the mighty *Modern Warfare 2*.



FUTUREMARK

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"With believable character animation in zero gravity being such a critical part of Shattered Horizon's gameplay experience, we relied upon Morpheme's flexibility and time saving tools to help us realise our creative vision."

Jaakko Haapasalo, Director of Futuremark Games Studio

FUTUREMARK GAMES STUDIO

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WorldView

Our digest of the past month's global games news...

DEALS

Capcom is to buy **Blue Castle Games**.

Audio outsourcing firm **Media Mill** has signed a deal with **The Creative Assembly** for *Shogun 2: Total War*.

PopCap has formed a partnership with publisher **NCsoft**.

Emergent is bolstering its tech workforce by striking a deal with inde studio **Krome**.

Epic Games is modifying its UDK engine to include support for **iOS** and **Android**.

Codemasters has signed an agreement with **Sega** to bring its Grid franchise to arcades.

CLARIFICATIONS

Page 86 of the **2010 Develop 100** incorrectly attributed *My Fitness Coach* (developed by Ubisoft Barcelona) to Respondesign (#71 on the ranking).

On page 31 of **Develop #109**, an inncorrect image was used for Dan Neil of FreeStyle Games. He doesn't look like that at all. He looks much more like this:

NINJA THEORY GETS NEXT DMC

Growing UK independent studio Ninja Theory has signed a major new deal with Capcom to develop the next *Devil May Cry* title.

The Cambridge-based outfit will continue to specialise in building third-person action titles, with the *DMC* game following directly on from *Enslaved: Odyssey to the West* and *Heavenly Sword* projects. The former is §set to be released this month.

The deal means that in the last five years Ninja Theory has built business relationships with SCEE, Namco Bandai and now Capcom.

Yet, with the studio remaining independent of its publishers, the group is yet work on its own self-owned IP.

The deal continues Capcom's collaborative operation with Western developers, a ongoing policy brought to light when the publisher's star exec Keiji Inafune infamously claimed that Japanese game development "is dead".

The *DMC* project was described by Capcom as being a 'collaborative' effort between the two groups.

www.ninjatheory.com

USA/SOUTH KOREA

AUTODESK SIGNS KOREAN TOOLS DEALS

Autodesk has signed two Kynapse licensing deals with Korean firms MAIET Entertainment and WeMade Entertainment for upcoming titles from both studios.

"We needed a middleware solution for the Unreal Engine that provided efficient data generation processing for path finding, solid AI for nonplayer characters and light run-time search costs," said WeMade MD Joseph Ryu.

"Autodesk Kynapse AI middleware was the obvious choice."

Autodesk VP Marc Stevens was enthusiastic about the potential for many similar deal in the future.

"Our middleware helps reduce development time and costs by offering solutions to common run-time challenges and minimising redundant efforts. It also enables studios to deliver more compelling games by allowing them to focus on what makes the game fun and unique," he said.

www.autodesk.com

CANADA

KEY HIRES AT WARNER BROS. MONTREAL STUDIO

Entertainment empire Warner Bros. added two experienced industry professionals to its growing start-up studio in Montreal.

WB Games Montreal will now be led by new studio head Martin Carrier and executive producer Reid Schneider.

Warner Bros Interactive president Martin Tremblay said he wants the new studio will employ up to 300 staff. The group will be woking on various projects based on the DC Comics franchise.

"WB Games Montreal has begun to take shape with many new hires and the appointments of gaming industry veterans Martin Carrier and Reid Schneider to lead the studio," said the firm's development vice president Samantha Ryan.

"Martin and Reid both have all of the interactive experience needed to lead the team in making quality games utilising our major properties. They will continue to build up the team and are currently hiring many new talented developers."

www.wbgames.com

FRANCE

ATARI APPOINTS NEW DEVELOPMENT SVP

John Hayase has been appointed as the new SVP of Product Development at Atari, reporting directly to his employer and company CEO Jeff Lapin.

In his new role Hayase will focus on the overseeing of Atari's studio including Los Angeles, Cryptic Studios and Eden Games. He will also manage Atari's upcoming slate of titles including *Test Drive Unlimited 2*, *The Undergarden* and *Blade Kitten*.

"John joins Atari during an essential growth period in which we continue to transition our business toward the online space while maintaining a focus on retail," said CEO of Atari Jeff Lapin.

"His strong background leading development teams to produce free-to-play MMOs, digital and retail console products with some of the industry's most respected publishers, will serve Atari very well as we move forward."

www.atari.com

UK

PITBULL ANNOUNCES DEBUT CONTRACT

Pitbull Studio Limited, the studio formed by Robert Troughton from the remains of Midway Newcastle after it went into insolvency last summer, has announced its first project.

The contract is for "a circus game using the next-generation motion controllers", which Pitbull says will utilise new technology developed by the studio in-house.

"This project is allowing Pitbull to work with some next-generation technology that, otherwise we wouldn't have access to," said Pitbull MD Troughton.

"We were awarded the project because of the level of expertise we have within the company – for something like this our partners, who we can't reveal just yet, needed to be sure that they chose the right people for the job."

Pitbull's first title is expected to be released early next year.

www.pitbullstudio.co.uk

FOR THE LATEST NEWS...
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Our online resource features news, analysis and commentary posted daily, and is available via the web, mobile, RSS and daily email and news alert blasts.

BUNGIE BUILDING NEW PROPRIETARY ENGINE

Halo studio Bungie is edging into production on new internal tech for its next ten-year Activision project, the studio has confirmed.

Studio communications manager Brian Jarrard revealed in an interview with *Develop* that the studio will not be licensing a third-party engine to develop its new game.

Instead Bungie will build new tech from the ground up for its next ten-year franchise – one that will, presumably, weather the turbulence of an industry shift to the next generation of consoles.

"I think it goes hand-in-hand with our independent spirit," Jarrard said.

"Just like we don't want to develop a game off someone else's IP, we want to push our own technology in the same way. That's going to be our position for the foreseeable future

"The new engine is actually in development, it's in a stage where technically we're still at the end of a pre-production mode," Jarrard said.

"But now that *Reach* is done the full weight of our team is rolling into this engine project. Real work is getting underway."

Bungie's workforce now stands at over 180 staff.

www.bungie.net

FINLAND

RED LYNX MOVES INTO WIIWARE

Finland based developer RedLynx is dipping its toes in Nintendo's digital service, WiiWare.

The developer – which won fame for its XBLA stunt title, *Trials HD* – is building a similar side-scrolling physics-based racer for Nintendo's flagship home console.

The new game, entitled *MotoHeroz*, will feature daily online competitions as well as a local multiplayer.

"With this game, we are taking our expertise in downloadable content, addictive gameplay, and the racing genre, and adapting it to the strengths of the Wii," said Antti Ilvessuo, creative director of RedLynx.

"The result is a unique, appealing game that combines racing game thrills with platformer charm," he added.

www.redlynx.com

UK/CHINA

BEAUTIFUL GAME PARTNERS WITH CHINESE STUDIO

Eidos' Beautiful Game Studios is partnering with a Chinese games operator in a new bid to make an impact in the Asian territory.

The *Championship Manager* team will explore opportunities with China's Shanda Games, looking at the best ways to introduce the football management brand into the Asian market.

"Football is hugely popular in China, especially the European teams, so we are delighted to be partnering with one the biggest entertainment companies in the world to bring the *Championship Manager* brand to Chinese gamers and football fans," said Beautiful Game Studios general manager Roy Meredith.

He added that the studio has been "working closely with Eidos Shanghai, our studio in China, we have already commenced work on a co-development project with Shanda Games".

www.bgstudios.co.uk

NETHERLANDS

GUERRILLA CO-FOUNDERS FORM NEW STUDIO

The two original co-founders of Guerrilla Games have reunited and formed a new studio focused on online and digital games.

Martin de Ronde and Michiel Mol will spearhead their new studio, which they have named Vanguard Entertainment.

The studio is a merger of production company Karami and PSN/XBLA developer W! Games – of which the pair had interests in.

De Ronde and Mol want the new studio to work between the social and traditional console gaming spaces – two sectors that are merging, the pair believe.

"Over the past few years, we have been closely following the rapid rise of social network games, browser based games and new online business models associated with these platforms," said de Ronde.

www.wgames.biz

SAY WHAT?!

"It's almost silly; we have teams perpetually recreating the wheel – working on the same walking animations with every new project."

*Mixamo's newest advisory board member **Ed Fries** wants modern methods of animation to change...*

"I remember telling my agent before the Disney meeting that I knew they're not going to be interested in this stuff."

***Warren Spector** had some last-second nerves before pitching Deus Ex to the Disney group.*

"We don't need any more Fart apps."

Apple's new App Store Review Guidelines now make quality control rather clear.

"It's called a Wii. You spell it W - I - I. Nintendo make it."

The Develop team sells the gaming lifestyle to an eager, if slightly green, PR.

www.supermassivegames.com

SUPERMASSIVE GAMES

With the recent release of two of the titles in the PlayStation Move launch line-up as well as our innovative new online football game on PC, it's an exciting time at Supermassive Games!

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develop@supermassivegames.com

COMMENT: BUSINESS

3-Dimensional Pitfalls

by Nick Gibson, Games Investor Consulting

Many equate evolution in the game market with a process of constant technological innovation and improvement, but the reality is messier and imperfect. This month I'll analyse the wisdom of companies planning to use 3D game environments to solve what are seen as the deficiencies of the largely 2D social and other casual games markets.

I remember a phase back in the mid-90s when I received a number of business plans for companies claiming they would revolutionise the internet with 3D web sites, 3D shopping and so on. Whilst the technology was interesting, the plans were fundamentally flawed because 3D added nothing of value to end-users and indeed actually made the browsing and shopping experience more cumbersome, complicated and annoying. Over the last year I have experienced déjà vu from a wave of business plans claiming companies will revolutionise social network gaming and other forms of casual gaming with 3D technology and 'advanced' 3D games. Whilst not as hopeless a concept as 3D e-commerce, the business plans all fail in my eyes because they are predicated on the erroneous belief that all games markets are destined to evolve towards high end gaming experiences, growing ever more sophisticated and technologically advanced.

TRUE BELIEVERS

This is a belief that is held almost exclusively by life-long hardcore developers who have witnessed what they believe is an inevitable evolutionary process in the hardcore console, handheld and PC games habitats. 'Just imagine *FarmVille*, but with a proper games engine, decent graphics and experienced games designers' is the sort of refrain I have heard old-school games developers say on more than one occasion. Likewise for casual download games such as *Diner Dash* and *Cake Mania*, never regarded as 'real' games by hardcore games developers due to their 2D VGA resolution graphics and simplistic designs. Such critics are completely missing the point. These games neither need, nor do their players want, sophisticated 3D graphics.

Over the last ten years, the casual PC download market has spawned dozens of companies with turnovers in the tens of millions of dollars and around half-a-dozen with sales over $100m such as Real Arcade and Big Fish Games. Despite the vast sums generated by this market, a comparison between today's best selling games with those of a decade ago would reveal only modest increases in gameplay depth and little more than minor cosmetic and functional user interface improvements. This is a market that is populated by older players in their 30s and above, mainly women. For them, cute, clean and intuitive interfaces combined with fun gameplay are paramount. 99 per cent of the best-sellers, as a result, remain to this day 2D and low-res. Developers continue to try 3D titles but these, with a tiny number of exceptions, flop. Not only do they cost more to develop but they sell in significantly lower numbers compared to 2D titles. I would wager that this status quo will be the case in another decade.

> ***"You may well have the skills and technology to do cool-looking 3D, but that could lead to a painful lesson in Darwinian evolution."***

Several large-scale surveys of social network gamers this year have quantified what the leading companies in the space have been saying anecdotally for the last 18 months; that the core of the social network games market also comprises older, female players. One survey put the typical social network gamer at 43 and female. Just as we've found in casual download games, these gamers have little interest in 3D, especially if playing a 3D game necessitates a plug-in or application installation. There is not a single 3D Facebook title in the top 50 games and none of the leading developers have 3D titles. This is not because there has not been a supply of them; dozens of Unity or other 3D-engine powered games have been released on social networks. It is simply because 2D and (isometric) 2.5D are perfectly sufficient. I am not suggesting that there will never be demand for them (we believe that the younger and male gamer demographic is seriously under-served by social network games developers – but that is for another article), only that trying to tempt players away from cash cows such as *FrontierVille* using 3D is a fast-track to failure.

Above: Games like FarmVille have little to gain from a significant graphical upgrade

2D DEMOGRAPHICS

The other major demographic that is not subject to graphical arms races is young children. One of the first children's virtual worlds was Disney's *Toontown*, a cartoon massively multi-player 3D environment aimed at children under ten. Despite great fanfare during its early years, *Toontown* was eclipsed by a later title, *Club Penguin*, that eschewed 3D for the most basic of 2D worlds developed with a production budget a fraction of that of *Toontown*.

Club Penguin triumphed because, not in spite, of its simplicity. Post mortems of failed 3D virtual worlds targeting this age group have repeatedly revealed how young children are easily confused locating objects in and navigating around 3D environments.

So, the next time you look at a successful 2D or 2.5D game and think, I can improve this with proper 3D, take a close look at the game's user base and ask yourself whether their players actually want such a game.

You may well have the skills and technology to do cool-looking 3D but that is not sufficient rationale for making it and could lead to a painful lesson in Darwinian evolution. If you want to make a game for the mass casual audience, invest instead in creating something that is simple and fun. And 2D.

Nick Gibson is a director at Games Investor Consulting, providing research, strategy consulting and corporate finance services to the games, media and finance industries.
www.gamesinvestor.com

INDUSTRY ANALYSIS SPONSORED BY DEEP SILVER

COMMENT: DESIGN

A new beginning

by **Billy Thomson,** Ruffian Games

The City of Dundee has been the hub of the game development community in Scotland for the past 20 years or so. It could be argued that DMA Design started it all off, as it was the first of the games studios in Dundee. DMA made a name for itself as a successful games development studio which attracted a lot of big name publishers to take a look at the city to see if there were any other talented people ready to set up a studio and make great games.

This paved the way for Visual Sciences – set up by ex-DMA employees – and VIS Entertainment to start up studios and bring the game development workforce in Dundee to over 300 employees. For the past decade the owners and employees from those three studios have steadily influenced and grown the game development community in the Scottish city.

A lot of people don't realise just how many studios have been formed in Dundee over the years. It's a long list, considering Dundee only has a population of around 140,000. DMA Design 1988, Visual Sciences 1993, VIS Entertainment 1996, Denki 2000, Realtime Worlds 2002, Dynamo Games 2004, 4J Studios 2005, Tag Games, Proper Games and Cohort Studios all 2006 and then there's us, Ruffian Games 2008. I'm almost certain I've missed a good few off this list too, so apologies in advance.

DARK TIMES

Based on this level of growth across a number of different studios you would expect the game development community in Dundee to be thriving, but the past few years have seen a lot of these studios in the unenviable position where they have had to restructure, making a portion of their employees redundant to keep the studio alive. And others have not been quite so lucky and had to completely close their doors, making their entire studio workforce redundant and then selling off their remaining assets to try to come out of the whole business without accruing major debts.

The first to be affected was DMA Design when it had to make a section of its staff redundant back in 1998. The next to be hit by was VIS Entertainment when it went into administration in 2005 and closed shortly afterwards. Then it was the turn of Visual Sciences which was no more by mid-2006.

More recently Denki had to make the vast majority of its staff redundant in April 2010. And then RTW – the largest game development studio in the history of Dundee – went into administration in August 2010. And incredibly only a few days later Cohort Studios also had to make around half of its staff redundant. And while this must have been a terribly difficult decision, it at least made it early enough to ensure that the studio avoided administration.

> ***"The Dundee games community has taken a battering over the years, but it always comes back stronger and I'm sure that it will happen again this time."***

This reads like an entirely miserable course of events, and when you're in it yourself, it is. For some these closures were disastrous to their personal lives, to others they presented fantastic opportunities that may not have been obvious to them before. Over the past few weeks Dundee has seen the biggest publishers on the planet send their recruitment teams to the city to talk to the hundreds of people who had been made redundant and many of those guys now have multiple job offers at fantastic studios.

POSITIVE THINKING

So while it looks like a disaster there are normally some positives that come from these unfortunate events. Some people will move away to other studios outside Dundee, others will join the existing studios still doing well in the city, and some will be lucky enough to start their own studios and see if they can make a success out of this fickle industry. I also heard that Realtime Worlds may have a speck of light at the end of the tunnel, with rumours flowing in about *MyWorld* being bought by Ian Hetherington – former chairman and chief strategy officer of Realtime Worlds – and also the possibility of *APB*'s fantastic customisation tools being worked into an already well known engine and franchise in the States. Admittedly both of these are unconfirmed rumours, but many of the negative rumours over the past months have painfully turned out to be true. So I've got my fingers crossed that these more positive rumours also turn into fact.

The Dundee games development community has taken a battering over the years, but it always comes back stronger and I see no reason to believe that this trait will not continue into the coming years.

The city of Dundee has seen more than its fair share of ups and downs as far as the development industry is concerned

Billy Thomson is the creative director of newly-formed developer Ruffian Games. Billy has over 13 years experience of designing video games, including design roles on *Grand Theft Auto* and *GTA2*, before working as lead designer on Realtime Worlds' celebrated *Crackdown*.
www.ruffiangames.com

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*Sources: Arab Media Outlook 2010. Media on the Move 2009. A.T. Kearney. Introduction to Gaming. Michael Moore. Screen Digest. IDC.

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COMMENT: INDUSTRY

Is pre-owned going to kill us?

by David Braben, Frontier Developments

There have been all sorts of statements about so-called pre-owned games, and quite a lot of people spouting hyperbole. To be honest I have been one of those people, but that doesn't mean there isn't a truth to it.

We see more and more developers and publishers speaking out against pre-owned, while more and more retailers – even supermarkets now – are getting their wide-bore snouts deep into this trough. But, apart from speaking out, we are really doing very little about it.

Since I last wrote about it nearly a year ago, little has changed, other than my fear (a plethora of type-in codes and 'memberships') having largely come to pass. The deck is sloping, the band is playing, and we are shouting and gesturing angrily to each other about the iceberg. One or two people are building rafts, but no-one is plugging the hole. We're all waiting for someone else to move first.

If you don't believe pre-owned is causing a huge dent in our sales, then look at the figures: In the US in 2008/2009 42 per cent of GameStop's profits (as the biggest specialist retailer in the US) came from pre-owned game sales, and gross profit on pre-owned alone climbed to just under $1 billion. It is no wonder supermarkets and corner shops are joining in the plunder.

We need to look at it sensibly – we need to think not just of developers and publishers, but players and retailers too.

PLAYERS

There is a strong argument that players want the prices of games to come down, which sounds obvious enough – and that is effectively what pre-owned does, if you return the game after playing it. Our fragmentary response to the problem, one-time codes and so on, is in danger of reducing the incentive to keep them anyway, devaluing a collection if it is bound to numerous different accounts and codes, with no certainty that in the future these codes will continue to work.

RETAILERS

High Street retailers were having a hard time of it before they started with pre-owned – new games are rarely sold for anything close to the RRP these days, going for not a great deal more than the trade price in some cases (especially online). So retailers' margins are now very slim on new games. This process of margin erosion is starting to happen to pre-owned too, and will increase as the supermarkets get up to speed.

Such a decrease in the profit from pre-owned to retailers makes it less valuable to them, so may make them rather less resistant to change.

It is not completely bleak; pre-owned does – effectively – put some money back on the table, as the cost of goods is saved each time a game goes around the loop. But fundamentally there is now less money to go around as retailers have educated gamers to think that a lower price is what they should expect.

> ***"The inaction of our industry so far has essentially given retailers the go-ahead. There needs to be a real likelihood of things changing imminently."***

It would be possible for retailers to pay a slice of the pre-owned revenue to publishers and developers, but I can hear the calls already: 'Why should we?' Perhaps they are right. The inaction of our industry so far has essentially given them the go-ahead. There needs to be a real likelihood of things changing imminently right across the industry for any action to be taken.

ACTION

There are six ways we can go:

1. Carry on with the array of ad-hoc one-time codes, online 'passes', DLC, to tilt players toward new purchases.

2. Introduction of cross-industry serial numbering of discs. This shouldn't mean the complete freezing out of pre-owned – it would be up to developers and publishers what to do – but it does give the option of a whole range of possibilities, including ones currently covered by the one-time codes.

3. Industry participation in pre-owned sales. This has to be with the retailers' agreement, but this may come, as long as there is an upside to them, and that upside could be as part of holding off on the worse excesses of (2).

4. Bring in 'Not for Resale' SKUs. Why is there no parallel with DVD sales? It is because they do not allow resale or rental – and in fact have special 'for rental' SKUs at a significanly greater price.

5. Make the discs just data discs costing say, £5, perhaps containing an extended demo, but requiring online validation to become a full game (eg by withholding the executable file), even for the first user.

6. Move to online-only. This is where the retailers seem to want us to go after all, so perhaps it's time to make the jump.

Whatever the tactic, let's do something soon, and stop all the shouting about the unjust iceberg.

Is it time to stop talking about pre-owned, and start doing something about it?

David Braben is the founder of Cambridge-based Frontier Developments. Best known as the co-creator of *Elite*, Braben has contributed to, designed or overseen a number of other projects including *Frontier: Elite II*, *Dog's Life*, *Thrillville* and *LostWinds*. Frontier is currently developing his next title, *The Outsider*. He is also closely involved with Skillset.
www.frontier.co.uk

INDUSTRY ANALYSIS SPONSORED BY DEEP SILVER

COMMENT: TECHNOLOGY

Giving a DAM

by Ben Board, Microsoft

Christmas. Bodhi Day. Yule. Hanukkah. Festivus. Eid. Samhain. Winterval. Sol Invictus. Kwanzaa. The Feast of Winter Vale. It seems every culture has a ring around some part of the winter calendar.

I don't know how many of those festivals feature the giving and receiving of gifts but enough, it seems, to make that period overwhelmingly the focus of the year for people who make the things other people like to unwrap. Even if your December 25th is just a day that you can't get a pint of milk, if you work in European games production there's a pretty good chance that your late-summer days are long and hot for reasons other than the position of the sun.

And it's certainly frantic for us. We make this sort of video games console, you see – the Xbox 360, as I think we've established – and you guys make games for it, using a few house rules to encourage those games to be made in a way that's consistent, secure, legal and so on. And we ask to have a look at the game when you're done with it to make sure all is peachy. So come this time of year the Certification dept are up to their scalps in submissions. Some of their compliance work is right now taking place in rows of ersatz, soundproofed living rooms in Slough, by burly Cert technicians wearing wigs and dresses. Now there's taking one for the team.

FEELING FESTIVE

This holiday is Xbox 360's sixth, and a little crunchier than usual, with the launches of both the Xbox Live-capable Windows Phone 7, and Kinect, of course, just a month away. The preparations for the former included a soup-to-nuts upgrade of our submissions pipeline that's just gone live in the form of our new Game Developer Network portal, GDN, which replaces XDS, Xbox 360/Games for Windows Live Central as-was.

Naturally the switch is going without a hitch. A hitchless switch, smooth as a baby's bottom, hardly any wrinkles. Okay, some wrinkles, but the new system is a big step forward in useability – a single portal for submitting and tracking content, development and publisher documentation, hardware ordering and the rest. If you're submitting in the next few months it's worth a pre-emptive practice run now – lean on your Account Management team for support while you get to grips with it.

Who's my Account Management team, you say? As you'll know if you follow this column, or are reading the hardbound stocking filler *Collected Writings Edition*, Xbox is constantly evolving. New technical developments enable new platform features for devs to use. New commercial initiatives create money-making opportunities for publishers.

The AM team is the interface between the platform team and the rest of the ecosystem, making sure that evolution happens in partnership with the people making the games.

> ***"The Develop Account Manager (DAM) team is the conduit between Xbox and studios. We help developers trying to get things done on our platforms."***

For those asleep at the back, I'm a developer account manager, and I work in Xbox's Third-Party Publishing group (3PP) in Europe. Charlie Skilbeck and new arrival William Leach complete the EMEA DAM team, and our role is to be the conduit between Xbox and dev studios, available to help any Xbox developer trying to get something done on our platforms. So while we're dev-facing and talk development and tech, our colleagues the AMs are the platform contact point for publishers, and their focus is on commercial and strategic matters.

SWORN TO PROTECT

Each publisher also has a marketing manager on the platform for any promotional collaborations, and the fourth corner of the Xbox v-team for each title is your RM, or release manager. When you submit your title to cert, or are planning to, they're your contact point and the person from whom you'll hear progress reports; and just like QA leads the world over, this time of year you can often find them hidden inside a cloud of swearing. Contact gamesrep@microsoft.com to find your AM team.

It's the nightmare before Christmas for developers – and Certification execs everywhere

An unusually busy holiday season for you and us, then, but that's no bad thing: It's not often you're working on two platform releases simultaneously, in addition to 360 titles of ever-increasingly quality – indeed, some at a level where the rest of the crowd part to make way. We're even starting to see those ripples extending further, with big titles once slated for a winter release moving to spring, where in turn they displace smaller titles into the summer. Meanwhile the scale and cost of these ever-bigger blockbusters is encouraging some superb developers, long on experience but more modest of means, to focus on digital games, where entertainment trumps extent. But whether it's XBLA, Indie Games, retail blockbusters, controller-free gaming, or Live premium-quality mobile snacks, not to mention the options on other platforms, I think the scale and breadth of opportunities for devs large and small this holiday season are better than ever.

Ben Board is European developer account manager at Microsoft, supporting all studios working on games for Xbox and Games For Windows platforms. He previously worked as a programmer and producer at the likes of Bullfrog, EA and Lionhead.

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Better the Devil you don't

Dante's use of hair dye may have sparked an internet civil war, but Ninja Theory is still buzzing from taking control of a vital Capcom IP. Development boss **Nina Kristensen** talks to rob Crossley the new deal, and the studio's future...

Why do you think Capcom chose Ninja Theory to work on one of its biggest IPs?
I think there's a few elements. Firstly we have a reputation within the fighting genre, and for telling a compelling story with good cinematography and believable characters. Those two things are key to telling the next story of Dante. I think there was a lot of synergy between us and Capcom – what they are looking for is what we love doing.

This being your third big project, you're still not producing a game from your own IP.
[Laughs] True.

And the studio has in the past talked of the importance of owning IP.
I think with *Devil May Cry*, [the deal] was a great opportunity. It is a beloved franchise and for us it was a very good fit – it's all about the things we love; high energy fighting and cool cinematics.

It was also a project that wasn't an original IP, which we've never tackled before. This deal was of course a no-brainer for us.

Are you still pursuing projects where you own your IP, or does Ninja Theory need to continue on a work-for-hire basis?
I think it's more complicated than that. If you're owning your IP it is incredibly valuable. It's something that we're pursuing.

That being said, if someone else is funding a project, then having key creative rights within that IP is also important, from a business perspective as well as a creative perspective. If you've spent as many years of your life conceiving something new and exciting and it's your baby and you want it to be treated really well.

Do you want Ninja Theory to remain an independent studio?
You know what, it's really fun being an independent developer. It really is. We get to choose our projects. We get to work on stuff we like. There's a really good vibe here.

I get the impression Capcom's given you an uncommonly high amount of freedom with the project. Is that so?
Yes they have. Capcom came to us because they felt we could add something to the franchise that hadn't been seen before; that something would reinvigorate it. But they also knew that we would also respect the DNA of *Devil May Cry*.

Capcom are a very empowering company. They have a very clear idea of what they want to do, and they give us a lot of freedom to take the game's vision forward.

I think we're bringing a new look and feel to the franchise, because it's important to have the franchise appeal to a broader audience. Obviously the franchise has very loyal fans.

Of course.
[Laughs] And we hope that in due course that they would love what we're doing too. We are respecting the true DNA of the franchise. At its core, *Devil May Cry* is a high-octane fighting game that makes you feel very, very cool.

That's what we fundamentally need *Devil May Cry* to be, but we're brining it in to a visualisation that is a little more down-to-earth, a little more urban and has more of a general western appeal. We're also going to be pushing on the storytelling aspect, and the engagement with the characters.

> ***"The concepts for Dante went through a lot of iterations. The first time we sent our initial concepts to Capcom, they said 'No, you need to push it way further'."***
>
> Nina Kristensen, Ninja Theory

What was Capcom's response when you showed them Ninja Theory's original concepts for Dante?
The concepts for Dante went through a lot of different iterations – they went all over the place – we went really far out with some. The first time we sent our initial concepts to Capcom Japan, they said no, no you need to push it way further.

Because, obviously, Dante is a big character for Capcom, we stuck fairly close to the original design template. But Japan said we needed to go much further, go crazy with it, and so we did.

Does it still matter to be an independent UK developer – or is the industry far too much a global enterprise for nationality to be relevant?
I think game development, absolutely, operates on the world stage.

I'm very pleased to be here in the UK. There is a huge amount of talent here. There is obviously the concern that a lot of of a lot of that talent is moving overseas to places where it's more economical to develop games, and I do think that is a problem generally for studios across the UK.

But I would also say that outside of whether the industry gets support for the Government – for the record I by and large don't approve of tax breaks, where ever they are implemented.

Businesses should be profitable without having to rely on the help of the state. If you're not profitable you shouldn't really be in business.

Regardless of my personal opinion, I think the UK industry now should get tax breaks – simply because it now is competing on a world stage with other countries that do. The UK is at a disadvantage and needs that balance addressed.

www.ninjatheory.com

Nina Kristensen (inset) and her colleagues have benefitted from a great deal of freedom when working with Capcom on DMC

SONY TO OUTLINE 3D VISION AT DEVELOP LIVERPOOL

SCEWW's senior director Mick Hocking to present conference keynote in full 3D

Sony Computer Entertainment is to deliver a special keynote at the Develop in Liverpool conference. The session will see senior director Mick Hocking give an overview of the past, present and future of stereoscopic 3D in games.

The session, titled 'Seeing is Believing: 3D a New Creative Medium for Games', will be presented in full 3D.

Hocking, who heads up the WWS Stereoscopic 3D team and is group studio director for Evolution Studios, SCE Studio Liverpool and BigBig Studios, told *Develop*: "My talk will emphasise that the success of the 3D games market depends on the availability of high quality 3D games. In order to explain what I mean by 'high quality 3D' I will look at case studies of some of the 3D titles we have created so far to demonstrate what 3D looks like when it's done well.

"I'll also address some of some of the common pitfalls when developing for 3D, how to avoid them and also the solutions that we have used to solve some of the genre specific challenges in converting these games to stereoscopic 3D. Examples will be given in full 3D so that the audience can see live examples of good – and bad – 3D." Hocking will also look at the potential for innovation with 3D games tech.

The keynote will kick off at 9.30am at the Odeon cinema in Liverpool One, just round the corner from the New Hilton, where the rest of the conference is held.

Develop in Liverpool takes place on Thursday November 25th at a venue yet to be confirmed.

liverpool.develop-conference.com

25 november 2010 develop in Liverpool

THE MONTH AHEAD

A look at what October has in store for the industry and beyond…

OCTOBER 5TH TO 8TH:
GDC Online takes a look at the world of social, free-to-play and MMOs. And yes, it takes place in the real world.

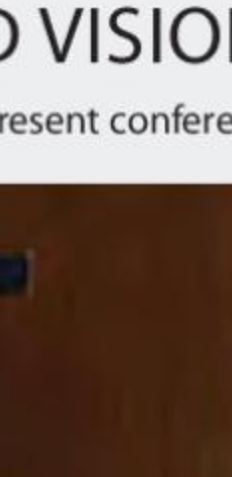
OCTOBER 8TH:
The Develop Football Challenge kicks off. A rare chance to boot your rivals' shins and swear aggressively at your colleagues.

develop FOOTBALL CHALLENGE 2010

OCTOBER 10TH:
World Conker Championships: proper old school gaming.

OCTOBER 14TH:
The Games Media Awards. The video game journalists that deserve it get recognised for their efforts

OCTOBER 15TH:
Chart-topping hardcore titles have reason to be nervous – **Just Dance 2** hits retail.



OCTOBER 20TH:
The UK government will deliver the news on its **Spending Review**. In other words, the date to stop thinking about tax breaks altogether.

OCTOBER 22ND:
DJ Hero 2 gives a new wave of middle aged men in their living rooms a chance to impersonate middle aged men playing in clubs.

OCTOBER 26TH:
The Sims 3 finally makes its outing on consoles. We can whip out the hackneyed term 'virtual doll's house' again.

OCTOBER 29TH:
Lionhead's **Fable III** is set to see release, wrapping up an impressively swift (well, swift for Lionhead) devevelopment timeframe.

OCTOBER 29TH:
Continuing a busy month for peripheral manufacturers, **Rock Band 3** takes to the stage. Put it up to eleven.

OCTOBER 31ST:
The clocks go back (UK) at midnight. An extra hour in bed, unless you're in testing, programming, or crunch, in which case you get and extra hour at your desk.

OCTOBER 31ST:
Halloween. A career spent at a monitor finally pays off, as coders' pale skin becomes chic – for one night only.

NOVEMBER 4TH:
The London Games Conference looks at survival and profit in a changing industry, and is set to be damn insightful.

lgc london games conference 2010

FOR THE LATEST EVENT NEWS...

WWW.DEVELOP-ONLINE.NET/EVENTS/NETWORKING

Our online events guide features all the information needed to pick the world's best shows, and provides a detailed synopsis of global conferences, regional gatherings and networking dates

PLAYFISH CEO TO KEYNOTE EVOLVE'S LONDON DEBUT

Casual and social event also set to welcome Ngmoco boss

8 December 2010 evolve in London

Playfish CEO and co-founder Kristian Segerstrale is to keynote the Evolve conference, which takes place in London for the first time this year.

Taking to the stage to deliver a session titled 'Social gaming: After the revolution', Segerstrale is set to address the challenges of trying to keep pace with the world of social gaming, and will offer advice for those looking to catch-up with a sector of the industry once viewed as something of a curiosity.

Also confirmed to speak at the conference is ngmoco CEO Neil Young, who will explore lessons learned by the arrival of the iPhone. Under the heading 'How what we learned on iPhone will change all games forever', Young will analyse how many of the predictions made about the digital revolution were misguided, and look at what can be learned.

Previously a popular track at the Brighton Develop Conference, this year marks Evolve's first appearance as an event in its own right.

The day-long conference takes place on December 8th at a central London venue, and is aimed at producers, designers, developers and other professionals involved in the expanding crossover of TV, social networking, mobile devices and consoles.

www.evolveconference.com

DEVELOP DIARY

Your complete games development event calendar for the months ahead...

london games festival

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The London Games Festival is back for its fourth year, with more exciting events for both consumers and industry professionals alike.

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Spanning a number of key London locations including The Brompton Hall, BAFTA and Excel London - the festival includes events like the Eurogamer Expo, which brings together consumers and industry, the Golden Joystick Awards, the Lonon Games Conference and London MCM Expo.

More information can be found on the event website.

OCTOBER 2010

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October 1st to November 4th
London, England
www.londongamesfestival.co.uk

GDC ONLINE
October 5th to 8th
Austin, Texas, US
www.gdconline.com

DEVELOP FOOTBALL CHALLENGE
October 8th
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www.develop-online.net

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October 21st to 23rd
Kyiv, Ukraine
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NOVEMBER 2010

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November 4th
London, England
www.develop-online.net

MONTREAL INT. GAMES SUMMIT
November 8th to 14th
Montreal, Canada
sijm.ca/2010

NEON 10
November 8th to 14th
Dundee, Scotland
www.northeastofnorth.com

UNITE 2010 CONFERENCE
November 10th to 12th
Old Montreal, Canada
unity3d.com/unite

GAME CONNECTION
November 16th to 18th
Lyon, France
www.game-connection.com/events

ME AWARDS 2010
November 18th
London, England
www.mobile-ent.biz

DECEMBER 2010

ITALIAN VIDEO GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE
December 3rd
Rome, Italy
www.ivdconf.com

GDC CHINA
December 5th to 7th
Shanghai, China
www.gdcchina.com

EVOLVE IN LONDON
November 8th
London, England
www.evolveconference.com

MCV PUB QUIZ
December 9th
London, England
www.mcvuk.com

LONDON CALLING

The global London Games Conference will welcome luminaries from the industry to talk new business models. Here's our guide to the event...

THIS YEARS' LONDON Games Conference is bringing together some of the biggest names from a host of innovative companies spanning the entire sector.

The event is set to examine the challenges faced by an industry that is being driven more than ever before by digital distribution, online play, social networks and the concept of 'games as a service'.

This year, the conference's theme is 'Survival And Profit In A Changing Industry'. The evening will be closed by the Minister for Culture Ed Vaizey.

LONDON GAMES CONFERENCE

Date: Thursday, November 4th, 2010

Time: 5pm – 8pm

Venue: BAFTA, Piccadilly, London

Passes: £269 + VAT
(contact Jodie.Holdway@intentmedia.co.uk)
Telephone +44 (0)1992 535 647

www.londongamesfestival.co.uk

WHAT'S ON

Phil Harrison is set chair a panel starring Shuji Utsumi of Q Entertainment, Ben Cousins of Easy (EA), Kristian Segerstarle of Playfish and Floris Jans Cuypers of Spil Games. The discussion will explore how the industry is evolving as a result of the rise of web, social and mobile gaming, and address the emergence of cloud technologies. The panel will also take an in depth look at the experiences of these successful companies, as those on the stage examine overall market trends and potential futures.

In a separate session *Develop* and *MCV* editor-in-chief Michael French will discuss new routes to market and emerging lines of communication with consumers. French will be joined by a number of leading opinion formers including Chris Petrovic, senior VP at retailer Gamestop and Simon Osgood from InComm.

Eurogamer TV's Johnny Minkley is to host the final panel session, which will examine what currently constitutes a platform. He will ask if the writing is on the wall for physical consoles, and investigate what is causing the shift. Confirmed panellists include Dave Perry from Gaikai, Jasper Smith from PlayJam and David Reeves from Capcom, providing a publisher's view of the new order.

Screen Digest's chief analyst Ben Keen will also present new research into the outlook for the games industry, examining how digital sales and other new business models will impact boxed product sales.

The London Games Conference has been made possible with support from its select sponsors. The event is backed by platinum sponsor IGN, and gold sponsors The Hut, AGI, InComm, Multiplay and Virgin Gaming.

TALKING SENSE

Speakers and panellists attending London Games Conference to talk about their digital experiences include:

■ Heiko Hubertz
Founder and CEO, Bigpoint

■ Dave Perry
Co-Founder and CEO, Gaikai

■ Ian Chambers
International Vice President, Direct2Drive

■ Shuji Utsumi
CEO, Q Entertainment

■ Phil Harrison
Co-Founder and General Partner, London Venture Partners

■ David Reeves
COO, Capcom Europe

■ Ben Cousins
Executive Producer, EA Dice

■ Chris Petrovic
SVP and GM, GameStop Digital Ventures

■ Floris Jan Cuypers
Business Development Director, Spil Games

■ Kristian Segerstrale
CEO, Playfish

lgc london games conference 2010

The MIGS Picture

As Canada's largest dedicated games industry show draws close, **Will Freeman** brings you the essential information you need to get the most out of the Montreal International Gaming Summit…

KEY FACTS

Date
November 8th to 9th

Venue
Hilton Bonaventure Hotel, Montreal, Quebec, Canada

Price
Individuals: $405 - $625 (members), $505 - $785 (non-members)
Groups: (per person) $460 - $530
Students: $275 (Early bird deadline has passed)

Web
sijm.ca

NEXT MONTH'S MONTREAL International Game Summit's status as Canada's biggest trade-specific video game conference doesn't just make it an event of national significance.

Thanks to the Canadian authorities' progressive attitude to tax incentives and the country's subsequent establishment as a global game development hub, the show – better known by its acronym MIGS, stands as an gathering of international significance.

Now in its seventh year, in 2010 MIGS promises to be a highlight of the increasingly busy events season calendar, offering a healthy variety of speakers, networking opportunities in the business lounge, workshops, social events, and a sizeable exhibition hall.

Thanks to the breadth and scope of the content offered, including seminars and sessions that look beyond the boundaries of the games industry alone, MIGS remains a highlight for developers, coders, designers, tool and service firms, and all those in the business of making games.

To the right we've picked some of the highlight sessions from over 80 speakers poised to address attendees, which last year numbered 1,400. MIGS is organised by Alliance Numérique, the interactive digital content industry business network of Quebec.

SPEAKING OUT

Develop picks a selection of the most interesting sessions, taking one from each of the five MIGS tracks...

Create Your Own Path: From Design to Art in Prince of Persia: the Forgotten Sands Wii

Track: Arts and VFX
Speakers: Steve Beaudoin, technical art director, Ubisoft Québec, Thierry Dansereau, art director, Ubisoft Québec
■ This session will address the various issues and challenges identified on the production of *Prince of Persia: The Forgotten Sands* for Wii, and will cover the debate about design versus art.

David vs. GoliathVille: Sage Advice for Indie Social Game Designers

Track: Design
Speaker: Scott Jon Siegel, game designer, Playdom
■ As the social gaming space is increasingly dominated by industry giants, the sector runs the risk of stagnation in the emerging fields. Intended as a call to arms for indies, this session aims to dispel the myths surrounding what success means in social game development.

Building a Global Technology Strategy When East Meets West

Track: Tech
Speaker: Julien Merceron, worldwide technology director, Square Enix Group
■ A look at what can be gained when companies from the East and West join forces as a single entity, and how contrasting cultures can be aligned within a business.

Leaderboards Can Suck It: Seven Better Ideas for Visualising Player Data for Fun and Profit

Track: Business
Speaker: Todd Northcutt, general manager, GameSpy Technology
■ Northcutt will argue that Leaderboards are boring, discouraging and lazy, and ask why they are so popular. Attendees can digest seven better ideas for engaging players with amazing data.

Investing in Talent: A Formal Approach to Studio-Wide Training

Track: Business
Speaker: John Nash, studio design director, Blitz Games Studio
■ Nash explains why the studio's most valuable asset is people. Nash will argue that the happier, more motivated and skilled a workforce is, the better studios are able to develop games and subsequently achieve a healthier bottom-line.

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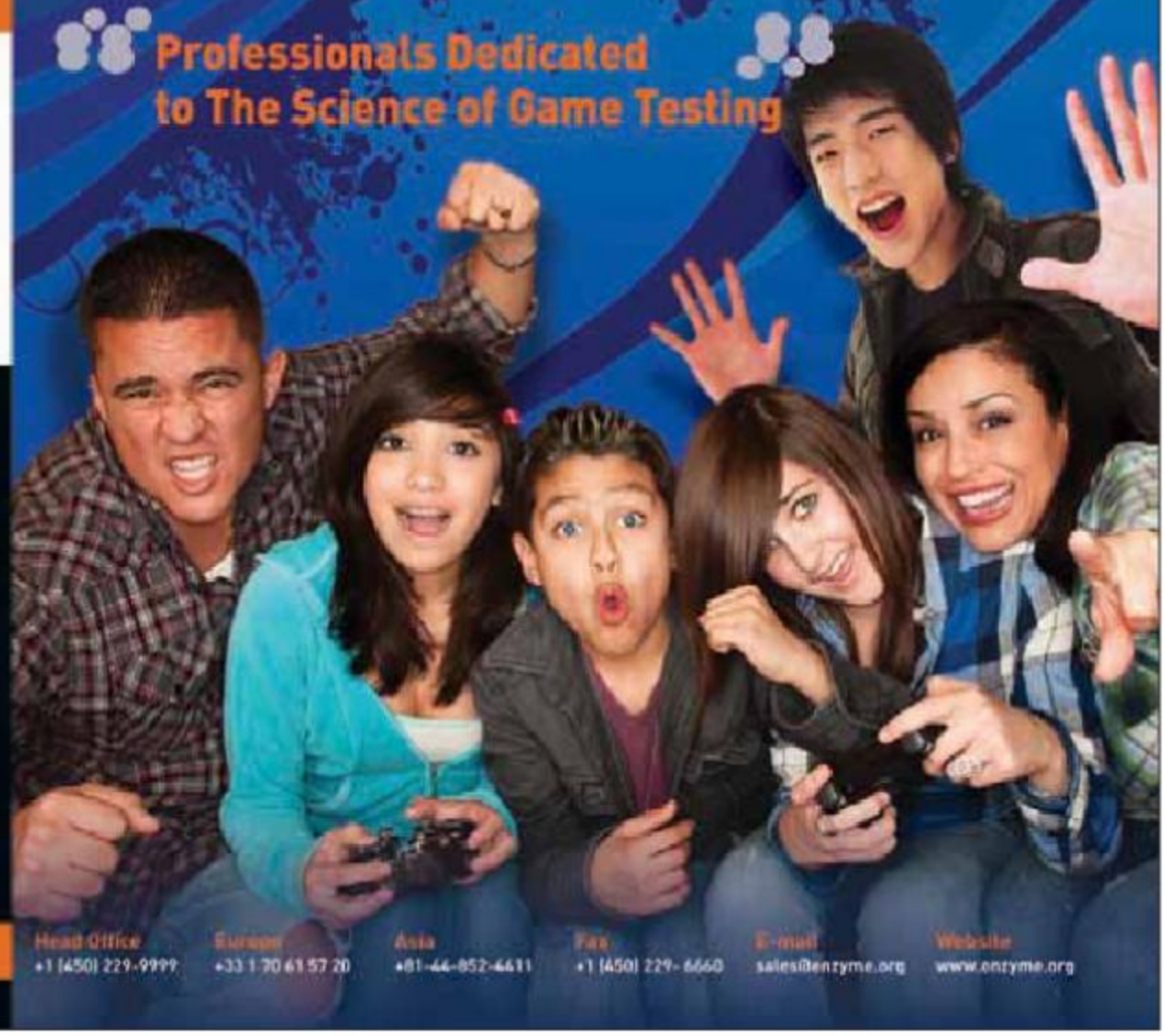

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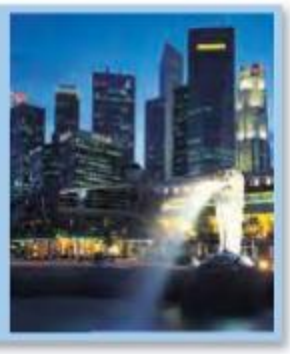
"I take my job seriously because I know publishers and developers use Metascores as a measure of quality."
Marc Doyle, Metacritic, p39

Region focus on the city-state of Singapore

p41



Ken Levine talks broken utopias and inspiration

p49

Epic on the future of Unreal - and all games

p34

Flying High

Angry Birds' creator Rovio thinks it has crafted an equation for making an iPhone hit, but what is its secret? p30

Rovio's magic numbers

Can there really be a rigid equation for making a hit game? The studio behind iPhone sensation Angry Birds says it has one. So what is its secret recipe? **Will Freeman** tries to find out…

If you've played *Angry Birds* you'll know that it's far from formulaic. It is a game with character, spirit and energy, all of which are hard to quantify with numbers and conventions.

However, *Angry Birds'* status as one of the most successful titles on the iPhone is no accident, says its developer. Finnish studio Rovio is sure it has crafted a magic recipe for making a hit game; that fabled equation for creative triumph that has long eluded those looking to make catchy pop tunes and good reads with mathematical precision.

Of course, Rovio's equation for success is highly tailoured. It is about making popular games on the Apple portables, and it has evolved over time.

Angry Birds remains one of the most succesful and prolific games on any of the iOS platforms

The formula is one that sets the perimetres in which the Rovio team can play with ideas, and provides focus on what makes a game popular with players.

Getting at why *Angry Birds* itself was so well liked by consumers is not rocket science. Simple, immediate and satisfying, the action-puzzler game costs just 59p, and as the provider of numerous free updates it offers dozens of hours of gameplay. The game, however, is not just the result of the eqaution. It is part of the sum's formulation.

Rovio's secret for success is an ongoing project, and apparently goes a little deeper than the fundementals of what makes *Angry Birds* one of the perennial poster children of Apple's new gaming model.

A NEAR HIT

In fact, the reality of developing a secret recipe for making a hit came as an unexpected benefit for the studio, and *Angry Birds* itself almost went unmade.

When the youthful Finnish team began work on *Angry Birds*, they had just one screenshot, a headcount of 12, and a slightly uncertain vision of what the game would be.

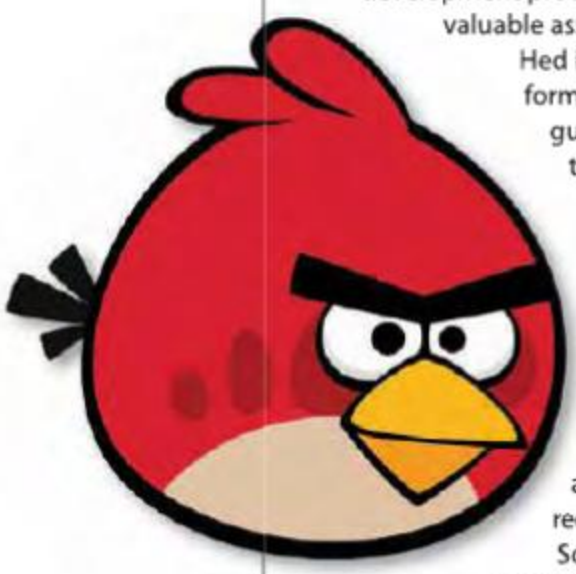
"We didn't understand what the game was really about at that point," admits Rovio COO Niklas Hed. "We wanted a way to come up with some easy to understand gameplay for the screenshot, and it got forgotten about for a few months.

"Then we started discussing how we could take the luck out of the equation when making a game. We wondered if there was some kind of common pattern we could use. Then we started defining a requirement list of things every game should have."

At that point, Hed and his colleagues looked back to Rovio's early history, and a time when they worked as sub-contractors for Nokia. The studio had fleshed out 50 games previously, and went on to create two iPhone titles – *Darkest Fear* and *Totomi* – all of which let it build its equation.

"We then combined that list – that equation – to the screenshot, and that was the starting point for the game," says Hed. As a result, Rovio has what it believes is a genre agnostic rulebook it can apply to its future titles on the iPhone.

Of course, the equation alone wasn't the making of *Angry Birds*. It also took a great deal of skill, time and play testing, and the result is a title with a finesse that has made it famous. Still, the secret recipe born from the development process has become a valuable asset for the studio.



Hed is keeping his magic formula a closely guarded secret, and there is little point in trying to get him to reveal its nuances, but he does admit that some of the factors on the list of criteria are obvious; simple details like building a creation that doesn't require a tutorial.

So just how did Rovio craft its clandestine recipe?

> ***"We wondered if there was some kind of common pattern we could use. Then we started defining a requirement list of things every game should have."***
>
> Niklas Hed, Rovio

"It's hard to explain," says Hed. "It's easy enough to make an equation for the outline of a good game, but with making a really good game there is this magic in it that you can't define so easily. We have new people joining the team, and in a way the requirement – the equation – sets the sandbox where they can play. It's about setting up a place where you can find the spark needed."

Summing up the approach as something of 'beauty', at a push Hed will admit it is possible to reverse engineer some of the equation from Rovio's games.

The notion of pulling Rovio's formula from Angry Bird's is a nice one in theory, but it would rather miss the point. What Hed and his colleagues have created is a equation that works for them, with their games. What can be learned from the Rovio case is that many studios may already be sitting on the elements that will form a customised equation for them. Taking a clinical look at back catalogue – and successes and failiures – may hold the secret to defining success in quantifiable terms. It's obvious, but crucial.

CORNER THE MARKET

In forming the basis for Rovio's perfect formula, the Helsinki-based outfit also dedicated numerous hours to market research. Hed also confesses that Rovio's 'disasterous' first iPhone games also helped forge the equation, and is happy to agree that there's is plenty more that can be done before it is complete.

"It is only one part of what makes a game be successful," concludes Rovio's COO, adding: "But it is something that we are guarding. That's why I'm so glad we have an equation like this, because we know why we made *Angry Birds* as successful as it is."

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"This changes everything. Again."

The slogan for Apple's iPhone and iPad devices may be unbearably smug – but it's also massively accurate. And now Epic Games is taking the initiative to push the platform forward further with the cutting-edge development software usually reserved for consoles. **Michael French** finds out what this means for the rest of the industry…

Can you believe it has only been two years since the iPhone App Store comprehensively upended the games industry status quo? By inspiring an app revolution from the grassroots of developers upwards, Apple's impact on games was swift, if unexpected.

The iPhone has made millionaires out of tiny teams almost overnight and changed the perceptions of what mobile gaming can do, all while attracting new audiences. Its well-curated interface and mostly-free distribution pipe has no doubt given the likes of Microsoft Sony, and Nintendo serious pause for thought.

So what an earth is the world's most popular console game engine firm doing on the most disruptive games platform of all time?

Epic Games finally unveiled the iOS version of its popular Unreal Engine 3 last month, showcasing the technological oomph of UE3 on iPhones through free demo download *Epic Citadel* and upcoming game *Project Sword*. The company was a centrepiece showcase as part of Apple's annual September product hooplah – a rare enough occurrence in itself; few in the games industry have been allowed to share the stage with Apple CEO Steve Jobs. And the message couldn't be clearer: mobile gaming has come of age.

CLEAR VISION

The sales pitch behind Epic's move to mobile is obvious.

"In the mobile games space maximising productivity is even more essential to being profitable," says Mark Rein, the Epic Games VP in charge of the firm's engine business. "You're going to need technology that can deliver a triple-A quality game, but do it efficiently. That's the advantage Unreal Engine 3 has compared with other technologies currently out there for making mobile games."

And the factors that have enabled Epic to offer its technology on iOS are just as clear.

"Thanks to OpenGL ES2 and powerful hardware we can do things like specular highlighting, bump-mapping, normal mapping and lots of other great techniques you don't expect to see on a mobile device. The 3GS achieved a large adoption rate, and now iPhone 4, 3rd Gen and 4th Gen iPod touch, and iPad are pushing it even further. So the installed base is there, and it runs our technology well. It just made sense for us to be there."

Rein says that the move is a labour of love as well as a great business move.

> ***"We can do things like specular highlighting, bump-mapping and lots of other great techniques you don't expect to see on a mobile device."***
>
> Mark Rein, Epic Games

"We love gadgets and technology," he tells *Develop* – virtually everyone at the studio owns a smartphone devices already.

But there really is more to it than Epic and Rein's usual swagger. The firm is moving onto mobile not just because it makes good business sense and is a technical fit – but because the rate of change is so fast on games-ready mobile devices. Rather than be left behind the way classic format-holders and publishers are, Epic is getting in on the trend early.

ITS A SMALL WORLD

But hang on. The big headline successes on iPhone are *Angry Birds*, *Flight Control*, and *Doodle Jump*, all sold for just 59p and made by tiny teams.

"Console style gaming is going mobile," says Mark Rein

What place does a company like Epic Games – famed for the powerful Unreal Engine 3, enabler of high-end games with equally high budgets – have in that world?

"I love *Angry Birds*, *Flight Control* and *Doodle Jump* but there are lots of successes on the iTunes App Store beyond those types of games," says Rein.

"For a long time, *Call of Duty* was one of the top iPhone grossing games. It might not have as many users as *Angry Birds*, but I'm willing to bet it made more money and it proves there's a market for all kinds of gaming experiences on the platform – there is no right or wrong on these platforms."

Rein says that historically, all media have proven that people are generally willing to pay for higher quality content.

"What we're seeing with the success of Madden, *GTA* and *Call of Duty* on iPad and iPhone is that big brands and big marketing, combined with high production values, creates mindshare that lets them stand out in a crowd. It's a natural evolution. When the audience size and expected sales justify a publisher like Ubisoft to spend $15m on a TV

NOT THE 'DROID WE'RE LOOKING FOR

MOST OF THE noise around mobile-ready UE3 focuses on iOS – and for good reason. It's the biggest smartphone platform at the moment. And while Epic is keenly watching all mobile devices, it's not sold on rival platform Android just yet.

Although UE3 has been up and running on Android for some time, it's not up to iPhone quality standards, says Rein.

"I think they still have a long way to go. I'm also worried that every Android phone vendor seems to have a different user interface than the other. It is unclear whether Google will step in and straighten it out or continue to let it grow out of control.

"Another problem with Android is the carriers run wild with the OS and are adding all kinds of bloatware and not-so-great custom user interfaces. Some companies are taking the open nature of OS to an extreme – can you imagine how happy Google was to see Verizon replace all Google Search with Bing on one of their Android phones? Hopefully that kind of shenanigans will wake Google up a bit. I couldn't imagine Apple letting any carrier hijack the customer experience to that sort of extreme. Apple is out there fighting the good fight on behalf of its end users and delivering a pretty consistent, and great, user experience around the world."

Instead of Google, Rein tips Microsoft as the dark horse in the mobile race.

"Microsoft could be a major disruptor here. One of the unique things they're doing is creating a proper first-party games organisation for Windows Mobile 7.

"They'll be making serious investments in high-quality exclusive games for their platform like they've done with the Xbox consoles, and they're bridging the social gaming aspects of the 360 and mobile platform through Xbox Live.

"If they combine that with the best Exchange integration, real Microsoft Office app compatibility and software on the phones and tablets then they could be serious competition to Apple. Plus, they have a huge amount of cash and a desire to not let mobile pass them by. The one thing they're not doing yet is native app support, which means we can't play on their platform. But both Apple and Google shipped with that constraint and fixed it later."

Below: Both Project Sword and Epic Citadel give a tantalising glimpse of the future of triple-A on mobile

advertising campaign for their latest *Assassin's Creed* mobile app, they will. This will happen. The great indie games will still be there – but the big games will get bigger just like they have on other platforms."

> ***"Imagine a future Xbox 360 that is actually a tablet you carry around. It will have more power than 360 does today, with technology like Kinect built right in."***
>
> Mark Rein, Epic Games

That's one of the reasons UE3 is so rapidly relevant to mobile. The engine became the go-to source for so many publishers during this generation because of the immediate look and feel it offered – the quintessential 'next-gen' chunky-sexy flavour that *Rainbow Six, BioShock, Mass Effect, Batman: Arkham Asylum* and hundreds of other renowned games embodied.

For those games' developers, using UE3 made them immediately competitive – something which will be attractive in the overcrowded App Store.

BADLANDS

It's probably going to irk some of the smaller firms that have embraced and exploited iPhone and want it to remain an unpoliced Wild West of video games. Rein reckons that the supposed 'destruction of publishers' brought about by more open digital distribution is a complete myth.

"It's nonsense," he says.

"If we're going to continue to have triple-A gaming experiences, which I'm convinced we will, then publishers are going to continue to play the key role in bringing the majority of them to market. They might cede distribution to online marketplaces like the iTunes App Store, but somebody still needs to finance, develop and market the games. Imagine if a few years ago filmmakers all decided the blockbuster was dead. We wouldn't have The *Dark Knight* and *Avatar* – two recent movies that made the list of all-time money-earners."

He's got a point. While *Angry Birds* and *Doodle Jump* are the aforementioned poster children of the App Revolution, they rose to the top through quality of gameplay – and quality of their marketing (the best marketing tool out there: word of mouth). For every *Angry Birds* and *Doodlejump* there's hundreds of awful, cheap and nasty games no one talks about. Or worse, cash-ins like *Angry Pigs* and *Doodle Army* that try to fool those using the App Store's crude search.

So as the platform gets busier the need for investment to make better games with enhanced marketing, increases significantly. As much as some developers and pundits are loath to admit it, many publishers are good at that stuff. Most importantly they provide financing for large risk projects, which are going to become more and more common on iOS and other mobile platforms.

ON THE MOVE

Epic's mobile play is also part of a wider bet on the direction the entire industry is heading in.

"A lot of gaming is going mobile and I believe that console-style gaming is going there as well," says Rein.

"Imagine a future Xbox 360 that is actually a tablet you carry around. It will have more power than 360 does today, with technology like Kinect built right in. Imagine walking into a bar with some friends, propping it up on the table and playing games like *Dance Central* or *Kinect Adventures* anywhere you go. Then when you get home that same device will use technology like AirPlay or wireless HDMI to connect to your big screen, you'll pick up a wireless controller, or use your phone as controller, to play games like *Gears of War*.

"It feels like there's a great opportunity for game consoles to cease to be something you plug into the wall and rather become

something you take with you. Of course it will be more than just your game console; you can have your productivity apps, your documents, and your media collections on it as well."

It's a bold theory from the kings of high-end game technology – the company which is so intrinsic to what the feel of current-gen console games became.

But Rein says it's not a dream – this shift is already happening with iPad and other devices in the works, and often new devices which were once solely more low-end productivity pieces are built with entertainment in mind.

"Lately it feels like Apple is spending more time and energy marketing games than the gaming console manufacturers are," he says.

"Today the companies making the hardware going inside phones know that games are important – they are incorporating processors that suit games and are as powerful as a PC or console. We're turning a corner with GPUs and CPUs that support the intensive gameplay functions we need.

"So we're going to see really powerful smaller machines emerge – they will be more powerful than a 360. To Epic that's where our interest lies. We're not interested in simple 2D games or games for the original iPhone or 3G; we want to bring high-quality, high-fidelity triple-A games to mobile. *Epic Citadel* woke a lot of people up – they realised it's real and can be done."

BEYOND THE HANDSET

'Mobile' technology is already propagating beyond handhelds into all kinds of devices such as TVs and set top boxes; Apple TV uses the same A4 chip as the iPhone 4, for instance. Intel and Nvidia have made huge strides in making cheaper PCs more game-capable.

"The phone is just the start – we'll be looking at other mobile-derived devices as well, as we go down the road. The same technology being used in mobile phones is also finding its way into set top boxes, Blu-ray players, TV sets and other embedded applications. Google TV is a good example – they're going to have an Android marketplace for their devices."

And then, Rein postulates, is when the industry comes full circle: games have spread like a virus across all these new hardware devices, switching on users to the potential of interactive entertainment. And the triple-A gaming, the broad and rather clunky term that really just means 'expensive-looking games', becomes something viable and attractive on all platforms. Of course Epic cleans up – its engine is the essence of that expensive triple-A luxury feel – but so does everyone else, Rein assets.

"Triple-A isn't going away – it's going everywhere. The definition of what triple-A is might morph a bit in the mobile space, but Epic and our licensees will be able to deliver a bona fide high-quality experience with the same kind of production values as the industry's best developers are doing on consoles today," says Rein.

> ***"For years everyone tried to say that gaming on the web was the way forward – but not so fast, folks – apps are way better and there's a huge installed base."***
>
> Mark Rein, Epic Games

"We're not just trying to bring the same kind of experiences users are already playing but rather give them something breathtaking that makes them clamour for more of this higher quality mobile entertainment our engine excels at providing."

ON THE CONTRARY

So much of what Epic and Rein see as the future of games is contrary to conventional wisdom. Right now, very vocal voices reckon that gaming is going online to live on the web and in browsers, dismantling consoles and destroying publishers along the way. The success of Facebook, Epic's closest rival Unity, and the shadow overcast by cloud gaming make broad points in this direction.

But the games industry is harder to predict. After all, three years ago who'd have thought that Apple's move on the mobile market was going to move the target away from voice and music to apps and entertainment?

"The App Revolution caught everyone by surprise," says Rein. "I don't even think Apple could predict how incredible it would be.

TOUCH OF CLASS

FOR A COMPANY like Epic, so entrenched in the PC and console worlds, the move to marrying its high-end, hardcore engines with the more casual touchscreen interfaces is still a learning experience, Rein admits.

But *Epic Citadel* ships with three different control schemes to let users toy with and figure out what works best.

"You can tap on the screen to move to a particular location or you could use the left joypad to navigate. Both of these modes support swiping with your finger to look around. The third mode is the more traditional dual-joypad mode where one joypad moves you and the other looks around much like an Xbox 360 or PS3 controller," Rein says.

"It is great to be able to experiment and get feedback from the users as to what they like best. With *Project Sword*, the game we demoed onstage at the Apple Special Event, we're adding additional control schemes. You can drag your sword across the screen or use icons to cause your knight to perform actions. A touch screen offers huge flexibility and the change for users to determine what works best for them.

"I expect that there will be all of kinds interesting and different control designs, both from us and our licensees. You can tailor those devices to suit all kinds of needs. Dragging, tapping and swiping – these haven't been part of triple-A games design before the iPhone came around."

"For years everyone tried to say that gaming on the web was the way forward – but not so fast, folks – apps are way better and now there's a huge installed base of customers hungry for the best ones. Apps don't bind you to clunky plug-ins or confusing interfaces in browsers. Apps immerse you into an experience. Apps get closer to the hardware's capabilities. In short apps trump the web. People are consuming the internet through apps more and more because the experience is better."

Free app *Epic Citadel*, which showcases UE3's capabilities on iPhone – and which the firm is not embarrassed to admit is just a tech taster – has been downloaded over a million times. That itself shows there really is an interest in that high-end content.

Just imagine what will happen when Epic's Chair studio finally releases the forthcoming *Project Sword*, the resulting RPG based in the same citadel environment.

In short Epic is well armed for the mobile transition, and wants to be the one handing out the weapons.

Rein concludes: "Eventually these devices will be your consoles – and we're the king of console game technology."

www.epicgames.com/technology

amiqus GAMES

Four's company

Continuing our ongoing Game Changers series looking at the companies realising a new vision of the development industry's future, **Will Freeman** finds himself on Foursquare…

Foursquare offers an innovative spin on the alternate reality game

In its simplest form, Foursquare turns real life into a game. If you don't know the format, it's relatively easy to understand; at a rudimentary level it is a mobile application designed to help users explore cities, and combines social networking elements with an achievements system.

The map-based app's current three million users can level up with a visit to a particular restaurant or landmark, and dominate a virtual underworld stretched over real world towns and cities as they carry out their day-to-day activities.

In many ways Foursquare is an embodiment of the increasingly popular concept of gamification. It's an easy term to turn one's nose up at, but behind the excess of syllables is a process that has the potential to embrace vast new audiences. Applying the theory and mechanics of gameplay to non-gaming experiences could become increasingly important for studios looking to diversify their work and up the number of sectors from which they draw revenue.

> ***"Forward thinking, developer empathetic and happy to step outside the boundaries of what defines the industry, Foursquare is every bit a Game Changer."***

Foursquare is today forming a bold template for that future, and with a significant userbase already enthralled by its work, is undeniably a Game Changer.

HIP TO BE SQUARE

Foursquare founders Dennis Crowley and Naveen Selvadurai sketched out the first draft for their shared idea on a kitchen table in New York in 2008, and today base their business in the city's iconic Village Voice building, where a team of 30 reside.

With over 15,000 venues already experimenting with running deals through Foursquare, the social networking app has proved very popular with businesses, and is gathering pace as more get on board.

The 'game' is also proving itself as a worthy platform for external developers, and already courts a number of titles built using the Foursquare API. Designed for studios large and small, the API not only caters for the creation of meta-games built through the existing Foursquare platform, but lets developers monitor the data generated by the app's community.

The API also lets creators retrieve player check-in history using a system where feeds are available in RSS, KML and iCal formats.

Already a number of games, plug-ins and mobile tools exist built in the API, but Foursquare's creators have not drawn a line under the platform yet, and are welcoming their industry contemporaries to help craft the definitive version of the developer interface.

ARG-Y BARGY

Foursquare's innovative spin on the alternate reality game not only offers a unique and customer-friendly experience in a sphere dominated by notoriously inaccessible titles, but provides developers with a distinct alternative to the overcrowded platforms offered by web and specific mobile devices.

Presently the installed userbase of Foursquare has a limited range of apps to chose from, meaning studios still have a good chance of making a hit on the platform. And with Foursquare available across iPhone, Android, Palm, Blackberry and other devices, the potential for an expanding audience is quite staggering.

Forward thinking, developer-empathetic and happy to step outside the boundaries of what defines the industry, Foursquare is every bit a Game Changer.

www.foursquare.com

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IN ASSOCIATION WITH...

Amiqus Games is a leading provider of specialist talent to the video games industry. The company recruits for some of the world's premier studios for artists, animators, producers, programmers, designers and executives such as studio heads and director level roles.

amiqus GAMES

Know the score

Review scores aggregation website Metacritic has become one of the most influential resources in the industry. ***Will Freeman*** *investigates the website's rise and rise…*

Founded in 2001 by siblings Marc Doyle and Julie Roberts, plus friend Jason Dietz, the Metacritic review scores aggregation system had until recently remained on largely the same technology and design template.

That alone is a testament to the website creators' forward thinking vision; almost a decade after inception, Metacritic in its fundementally original form is still relevant and contemporary.

More than that, it has become a keystone of the industry. Like it or loathe it, Metacritic scores are a subject of fascination not only for consumers, but PR departments, publishers, marketers, and even developers. Expected and average review scores have long been a point of tension as publishers and studios ink deals, and Metacritic has become the recognised standard for that process. Truly, the website has changed the ecosystem of the industry at almost every level.

SCORES TO SETTLE

"We were fortunate to have a strong vision of what we wanted to achieve right out of the gate," says co-founder Doyle of Metacritic's acceptance by the industry.

"By selecting the most respected critics in each industry, and by presenting their reviews and scores in an easy-to-digest format based on a sound and consistent scoring system, we enabled our users to make the most of their entertainment dollars by 'consuming' the highest quality movies, games, albums, or television shows."

As early as 2003, the first of the big game publishers began publically endorsing 'Metascores' as a *de facto* gauge of quality, clearly recognising Metacritic as a reliable, robust platform. Much of the website's quality can be attributed to the fact that it isn't automated, and that it constantly refreshes its list of relevant critics and publications. To a certain extent it holds not only the quality of developers to account, but also the work of the critics that ultimately make or break a game.

POWER-UP

That considered, Doyle is in a powerful position, but he is acutely aware of his responsibility.

"I've always welcomed suggestions from publishers, developers, and other creative people in the industry, and I have been personally available to these people to answer questions about our process, which has been appreciated, even if they don't always agree with our point of view," insists the co-founder.

"I take my job extremely seriously because I know many of these publishers and developers use our Metascores as a measure of quality, to be considered alongside sales when assessing the 'success' of a game."

> ***"To a certain extent, Metacritic holds not only the quality of developers to account, but also the work of the critics that ultimately make or break a game."***

Listening to feedback has lead to a constant refinement at Metacritic, which saw the site's core technology platform completely revised in August this year. Thanks to a new powerful backend users, can now search through a far more integrated database, browsing 'career' scores of publishers, writers, film directors and even record labels. If that notion is unsettling, fear not, as critics and publications can now also be monitored and compared.

PRESS ON

Of course, the very media Metacritic monitors is in its own state of flux and, thanks to the website's proximity to print and online publications, it is well positioned to look forward to the future of the relationship between games and the press.

"I can only hope that with the decline in the number and influence of traditional media outlets there will still be critics coming up in the tradition of Pauline Kael of *The New Yorker* or Joe Morgenstern of *The Wall Street Journal* – critics who produce reviews which are viewed as works of art in and of themselves," opines Doyle, who clearly adores the craft of criticism.

"It is the quality of analysis which has always been the most important element of a review, and the ability of a critic to draw from prior works and from culture at large in analysing a new work truly makes his or her work important."

As its 10th anniversary nears Metacritic is developing, expanding its remit and evolving its concept. That is big news for the development sector, because when Metacritic changes, the wider industry changes.

As it absorbs and delivers more cross-referenced data from the business' four corners, it looks set to become an even more important and influential resource.

www.metacritic.com

Above: Co-founder Marc Doyle takes his job seriously "because I know that publishers and developers use our Metascores as a measure of quality."

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CITY-STATE OF PLAY

Singapore is a powerful Asian centre of business, and an emerging force in games development. **Stuart Richardson** finds out why…

The beautiful city-state of Singapore has served as a de facto crossroads of the Eastern and Western worlds for the extent of its – at times tumultuous – existence.

Founded on the spot where a legendary lion passed a prince while he was hunting (yes, really), the region saw vicious fighting during the Second World War as a troops of the British Empire were beaten into surrender by Japanese forces. Following the later Japanese surrender, Singapore joined the Federation of Malaysia in the early 1960s, and declared full independece back in 1965.

Since then the country has faced down terrorist threats, financial meldowns and an outbreak of SARS, going on to become the fourth wealthiest country in the world, and the fastest growing economy. For a nation containing only 246 square miles of land, this is no mean feat.

The pull of this titanic economy on the interntional video games development industry is also a significant one. Singaporean official bodies themselves are hugely welcoming of the business development studios can bring. The national media regulatory body, the Media Development Authority, actively seeks to expand on the substantial existing workforce in the Sigaporean video games industry, as does government agency Contact Singapore.

Singapore's dramatic skyline reflects its growing economy

"The Singapore Government has identified the interactive and digital media industry as a key growth industry," says deputy executive director of Contact Sigapore Kee Ee Wah.

"The games industry is one of the key interactive and digital media sectors that we are seeking to grow, as we work towards our aim of becoming an Asian capital of digital media from which original content is created for global consumption."

> ***"There is a strong sense of community amongst studios both local and foreign. There are frequent industry meet-ups. Most studios know each other well."***
>
> Siddharth Jain, Playware

It is telling that those involved in games development in Singapore aim as high as they do. The nation in which they live represents the perfect example of a plucky underdog story, blighted by every possible setback and not only surviving but coming out in better shape than many of the bigger neighbours that surround it.

MR BLUE SKY

"Singapore is a relatively new player in the games industry, but it has a lot of government support in funding startups and experimental projects," suggests Robin Tan, creative director at critically-lauded XBLA title *Armor Valley*'s studio Protégé Production.

"Also, we have warm, sunny weather all year round."

It's an aging gag, but there is feeling that it represents something significant here. Singapore is a small but busy place with a growing multinational community establishing itself around games development. There is an open, friendly atmosphere that is reminiscent of a very flush and well-equipped version of the bedroom coders of old.

"There is a strong sense of community amongst studios both local and foreign," agrees Siddharth Jain, founder and creative director of casual and learning-based games studio Playware Studios Asia.

"There are frequent industry meet-ups. Most studios know each other well and business and contacts are often shared. Aggressive poaching from other companies is not a norm and usually avoided by everyone. Competition is friendly since the market is so large and diverse."

Sian Yue Tan, producer and studio head at nearby Ratloop Asia, shares this sentiment, pointing out the involvement of both institutions and the local community in helping new and established businesses and business models to expand and grow.

"IGDA Singapore regularly organises get-togethers, where they'd arrange interesting talks and presentations, followed by drinks.

"These meets are well attended and it's good to see more and more people at these gatherings every time we go. People are helping out in their spare time, whether a school offering its building as a venue, or people helping to organise, or speak at the events. This shows a tremendous amount of willingness from the community to share information and make things work."

Of course it is nigh-on impossible to opertate as a closed-circuit in a globalised world, and as outmoded as it may seem in 2010, there are occaisions where size matters.

PROTÉGÉ PRODUCTION

A Microsoft BizSpark startup incorporated in 2008, Protégé Production is an indie studio best known for its well-received XBLA title *Armor Valley*. Following the success of its debut game, the studio is now hard at work to following up on the reputation it quickly forged for itself.

"We are working on a launch title for Windows Phone 7, an *Armor Valley* port," explains creative and technical director Robin Tan.

"The original *Armor Valley* was completed late last year, and went on to win the IGF China 2009 Award for best audio, as well as being a top 20 finalist for Dream Build Play 2010. All of this was made possible by MDA startup funding at the start of our business."

And it doesn't end there. Protégé Production, as seems to be the standard with all Sigaporean businesses, has its eyes firmly set on the things that it still hopes to achieve.

"We are planning on developing the sequel to *Armor Valley*, and to keep getting bigger and better from that point," Tan says.

"The quality of content from Singapore is constantly improving, and people are taking notice. Certainly I hope to see the appriciation of what we get up to here growing around the world."

www.protegeproduction.com

PLAYWARE STUDIOS ASIA

Playware is a double-edged studio that creates titles for both the casual and educational markets. Under the guidance of creative director Siddharth Jain, the firm has developed titles as varied as the Facebook strategy title *M.A.T*, the in-development city-building game *Simplicity* and the teacher-training package *Petals*.

"We are currently working on two upcoming Facebook games. Singapore is very active on Facebook as a nation with nearly 2.5m out of the population of 5m on the network," Jain enthuses.

"Both games we are currently working on have a strong local flavour and a lot of local cultural nuances. We're heavily invested in games for learning and work closely with local schools and universities to develop commercial, entertainment games with a strong learning ethic."

Playware has crafted a niche that it seems to be getting a great deal of use from, and in which something good is being done. Clearly it will not be letting up its efforts any time soon.

"Games for learning is a key area for growth locally with a spate of interesting projects in the education and corporate sectors," Jain confirms.

"We have been growing quite steadily in this market and see the continuation of this positive trend."

www.playwarestudios.com

"Like all fast growing areas, there is an issue here with finding the right people sometimes, especially on the lead and senior levels," says Allan Simonsen, technical director and co-founder of Boomzap, the casual games studio responsible for titles like *Pirates Plund-Arrr*, out in North America on the Wii, and the oft-discussed casual titles of the likes of *Awakening: The Dreamless Castle*, whose development teams reside across the globe.

"You can find them overseas, but that tends to raise your costs. The historical case has been that the primary markets are overseas. But with the fall of big European publishers that tends to be the same for everyone except the US and East Asia."

SUNNY SIDE OF THE STREET

Despite confessing difficulties, that incurable Singaporean optimism soon finds its way into Simonsen's outlook. Asked whether Singapore is appriciated on the world stage, and in the west in particular, he is upbeat.

"Appreciated is a funny word. I think it's seen as a growing part of the global community, though it doesn't have the same profile as Korea or Canada. It's still finding its role, which makes it an incredibly exciting place to be."

Sian Yue Tan shares the notion that for Singapore, the plateau of what can be achieved has yet to be reached.

"Some of the major studios like Ubisoft and LucasArts have already set up shop here, proving their faith in the country's development capabilities and ecosystem. On a smaller scale, games created by Singaporean indie studios and individuals have been doing quite well in global games competitions like the IGF, which is a pretty good indicator of what the local talent pool has to offer western audiences.

"The last few years, games made in Singapore have consistently made it into the finals of that competition, which is a very encouraging thing to see. IGF 2010 saw over 3,000 submissions from all over the world and our game, *Rocketbirds: Revolution!*, garnered three nominations for excellence in audio, excellence in visual art and the Seamus McNally grand prize."

> ***"Some of the major studios like Ubisoft and LucasArts have already set up shop here, proving their faith in the country's development capabilities."***
>
> Sian Yue Tan, Ratloop Asia

It really is difficult to find anyone who doesn't hold high hopes for the years to come in Singapore.

"Singapore will definitely become a brand to reckon with on the worldwide stage, in time," states Playware's Siddharth Jain.

"Singapore already exports its education to other Asian countries with content produced locally being highly regarded in China, India, Indonesia, the Middle East and even as far as the United States. The rapidly-growing games sector is sure to recognise the value of this goodwill in the interactive sphere."

The enthusiasm that burns at a creative level on the island seems to have been built on a stong foundation of faith in both the development community at large and the national business models being constantly developed by Singapore's governmental organisations. Both the Media Development Authority and Contact Singapore seem to

The many cultures of Singapore leave a distinctive mark on the island

work tirelessly to generate interest in Singaporean business.

"The success Singapore has enjoyed in securing a slate of interactive digital media projects and playing host to some of the most exciting industry events in the region provides momentum in Singapore's drive to become an interactive digital media capital," explains Kee Ee Wah. "We will continue capitalising on emerging trends as we have done, as well as investing in world class-facilities to the benefit of media players here in Singapore and around the entire world."

Allan Simonsen has a slightly different way of putting it.

"Singapore's a great place, to live in and to have fun in," he says.

"The food is fantastic and cheap, the weather is wonderful and the girls are pretty. Come join us."

RATLOOP ASIA

Ratloop Asia, the sister-studio to the Ratloop based in Austin, Texas and incorporated with development staff in 2007, released its debut title *Rocketbirds Revolution!* last year.

There is no resting on laurels at Ratloop Asia, however.

"The game has recently been released via Direct2Drive and we're also exploring other distribution channels as well. From the positive reception that the game has received so far we've also been able to secure dev kits and recently started production on the next *Rocketbirds* game as a download for one of the major consoles," says studio head Sian Yue.

"We are also looking into expanding into the Chinese market, and meeting with a large online games provider there. We probably wouldn't have even considered the Chinese market had we been located in the west. Here in Singapore we are given a unique oppourtunity to test new waters."

The little studio has achieved a lot in a very short time, and Sian Yue is keen to point out that, as far as Ratloop Asia is concerned, this is just the beginning.

"We still have a long way to go, but I think we are on the right track."

www.ratloop.com

CONTACT SINGAPORE

Founded: 1998
Email: www.contactsingapore.sg
Address: 250 North Bridge Road
Raffles City Tower
Singapore 179101

Formed in 1998 by the Prime Minister's Office (Singapore), Contact Singapore came under the Ministry of Manpower during its April 2008 crossover with the Economic Development Board.

Today, Contact Singapore employs 65 dedicated staff focused on drawing people from around the world to work, invest and live in Singapore, with the ultimate aim of boosting national economic development.

The organisation has offices across the Asia-Pacific, Europe and North America. It partners Singapore-based employers to organise career fairs and networking sessions in cities across the globe, and provide updates on related business opportunities and various industry developments to individuals.

Contact Singapore also facilitates business development and relocation to Singapore by helping investors arrange for entry to the country via business visas and permanent residency programmes.

"We are a one-stop centre for those who wish to pursue a rewarding career in Singapore, as well as individuals and entrepreneurs who are keen to invest in or initiate new business activities here," explains the organisation's deputy executive director Kee Ee Wah.

"We actively link Singapore-based employers with global talent and provide updates on career opportunities and industry developments in Singapore."

Wah is also proud of the video games development talent that has been enticed by the promises of business in Singapore from both home and abroad.

"Singapore fosters a vibrant, creative environment in which game developing talent can meet and exchange ideas, and even generate more creativity," she says.

"Today, we have major international and home-grown game developers such as LucasArts, Electronic Arts, Ubisoft, Tecmo Koei, IGG, Rainbow, Singapore-MIT GAMBIT Game Labs, Softworld, Mikoishi, Matchmove Games and Ratloop Asia."

The liasing work that Contact Singapore puts in is also backed up by considerable financial heft on behalf of the Singapore Government proper, as well as many of its smaller related departments and authorities, as Kee Ee Wah describes.

"As a leading financial centre, Singapore offers valuable funding avenues. The government is a significant source, having seeded around S$190m (£91m) worth of co-production deals from 2003 ro 2007 via the Media Development Authority.

"There is also currently over S$1bn (£478m) worth of funds available for media projects and companies, stemming from private capital injected by banks, financial institutions and strategic investors."

A significant monetary enticement is also provided to ensure the region makes strides as large as possible in the research and development sector.

"To ensure Singapore remains a tred-setter, the IDM Programme Office was set up to spearhead efforts to boost R&D in the interactive and digital media industry, backed by a S$500m (£239m) budget from the National Research Foundation."

www.contactsingapore.sg

Above: Contact Singapore deputy executive director Kee Ee Wah

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Ringing the changes

ELSPA has changed its name, its logo, and its remit, and now it is throwing the doors open to developers. **Michael French** caught up with the organisation's chief to better understand what the UKIE rebranding means for the wider industry…

Industry body ELSPA has represented the interests of publishers since the close of the 1980s. Over that time it has achieved a great deal in the spheres of anti-piracy, sales charts, age-ratings, and interfacing with the Government.

However, the organisation served largely as a representative of publishers, and while there was crossover with what ELSPA provided and developers needed, it was clear that more was needed to embrace the industry in its entirety. And so it was that the Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers Association became the association for UK Interactive Entertainment.

"The clue is in the name," says UKIE director general Mike Rawlinson of the rebranding. "We were an association for publishers of entertainment and interactive leisure software. But the market is no longer fitting into the demarcation of publisher, developer, retailer or distributor – we are no longer in silos, but a more homogeneous market."

> ***"This is no longer an exclusive old boys' club – it is welcoming and requires participation from within to make it what our members want it to be."***
>
> Mike Rawlinson, UKIE

While much of what ELSPA handled will still be undertaken by UKIE, Rawlinson and his colleagues are looking at a wider remit, and tackling the issues that matter to everybody in the trade.

EXPANDED HORIZONS

Previously, ELSPA was unable to speak for the industry as a whole because of its genetic make-up; now it is in a stronger position, and should be able to execute more influence on change for the better. That considered, it is now welcoming developers to sign up as full members, while the likes of service providers and educators can sign up as associate members.

Furthermore, as the industry undergoes perhaps its most significant period of change, the formation of UKIE has allowed it to respond to the the shrinking publisher base, and diversification of platforms.

"The games industry is no longer about just a single physical point of contact – not just consoles or PCs, it's MMOs, browser and mobile as well now," suggests Rawlinson. "It's

Above: Former ELSPA head and new UKIE director Mike Rawlinson

EMERGING MARKETS

As part of its expanding remit and new dedication to the wider industry, UKIE wants to help support emerging businesses grow their operations in the UK games trade.

That means both external investment and internal improvement of the business practices within the industry.

"I want us to be seen as a resource for our members on information, resource, statistics, services like Chart-Track data, which is now adding digital data, and offer means for the industry to come together and share ideas, network, and hopefully open up business opportunities," explained UKIE's director general Michael Rawlinson.

"A key aim for me is the need to create the right business environment for the whole interactive entertainment industry – that's what UKIE's key role is.

"I think we've got a heritage of skills, expertise and creativity – but we don't shout about that enough.

"The UK has been a bit too defensive post-Byron and also on the economic front. Lots of murmurings about the Canadians and 'We don't have what they've got' – well, no, we don't have that, but we've got a lot of other things," states Rawlinson, moving onto business practice. "A business doesn't just succeed through tax breaks, but by being a good business – we're looking at how we can add ways to help UKIE members understand that and grow their business skills," he concludes.

a much bigger remit that we want to cover. That's why we're doing it. This is no longer an exclusive old boys' club – it is welcoming and requires participation and ownership from within to make it what our members want it to be, so we want them to come and join us."

COME TOGETHER

What that means is that UKIE will begin the daunting task of aligning the concerns and ambitions of developers and publishers; two groups often seen as diametrically opposed.

"The difficulty for each end of the business is making the right connections," explains Rawlinson. "Sometimes developers can feel that publishers don't want to see them and they are turned away at the door – but they must not forget that publishers wouldn't survive without their content. Whether that's from an internal studio, or a third-party, they need each other at some point or other, either to service the goods or the relationship.

"UKIE can add a huge amount to the industry to help the wide array of people within it get together and network – that will help break down those barriers and any fear of resentment of 'the other side', to show that both sides of the business should, will and can work together and be more united for the good of the industry going forward."

Perhaps surprisingly, UKIE is also stepping away from the tax breaks issue for the time being. While it will still build a case for their introduction, it is presently to shift focus to promoting the UK's position as a leader of the games industry, and promote the nation as a destination for companies and individuals working in the games industry.

Ultimately UKIE will be sharper, more vocal, and more proactive than its forbearer, which can only mean better things for UK developers.

JOIN THE CLUB

As part of its new strategy to widen the pool of individuals and companies it represents UKIE has introduced a new £500 membership package.

It's hoped the low-cost fee will help attract the emerging wave of online, casual, social and mobile games that the organisation formerly called ELSPA wants to reach.

Like ELSPA, membership of UKIE provides access to UK sales information and research, discounts for industry events, and contribution to member taskforces and working parties addressing the issues facing the industry.

But the significantly lower fee – which has been introduced beneath the higher-level packages including a £2,500 associate industry member price – will help widen the pool of people contributing to the revitalised tradeorganisation.

UKIE director general Michael Rawlinson explains the motivation for introducing a way to welcome new kinds of company to the fold: "Whilst the physical product market remains strong, the boundaries between traditional developers and publishers are blurring and new business models are emerging.

"Our new lower membership fee shows that UKIE welcomes these exciting new interactive entertainment businesses and is committed to representing them and giving them the support that they need to thrive."

Check out the UKIE website (see below) for more.

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A SITE FOR SORE EYES

ELSPA's rebirth as the UKIE includes a substantially upgraded website, which adds updates on campaigns with Government and more regular communication with its members to the existing members area and chart database.

The new site also boasts a new forum and the provision of networking opportunities for individuals whose companies are signed up as members.

Ancillary services like recruitment feeds are also under consideration.

"Showcasing is a big part of the website as well," says Rawlinson. "Every company who is a member of UKIE will have the opportunity to showcase their work to other members and to the world at large. That could be very useful for someone creating content that might want to reach out to publishers."

www.ukie.info

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The Sky is falling

Ken Levine likes to build utopian worlds and have them crash from cloud nine broken and blood-drenched. **Rob Crossley** gets inside the mind of the man at the helm of the BioShock Infinite project...

A young Ken Levine was spewed like vomit from Hollywood's intestines. Flushed away with a blank filmography in hand, an agent who stopped returning his calls, a scriptwriting dream shattered.

Today, some 20 years later, that devastation has become his muse; the bedrock inspiration of his output as creative lead at Boston-based Irrational Games.

"I've actually been thinking a lot about my game ideas recently," he tells *Develop*.

"When I was jogging the other day I asked myself; why do I keep building these types of games? These perfect worlds where something goes wrong? It got me thinking about my own life, and how everyone tries to create their own little utopias."

Levine has helped advance the dialogue of video games. Not by their text and certainly not through cut-scenes, but by building living societies – fantasy worlds – and setting upon them the realities of man: paranoia, greed, corruption. In Levine's most famous works *Thief*, *System Shock 2* and his breakthrough game *BioShock*, the player is told stories, usually a series of waxen-wing parables, by interacting with the aftermath.

"You have these dreams, these ideas, these creations of how good it's all going to be, and you work your life towards those goals. They're just hopes and ideas, they're just things that spring from our heads, but they happen to define our whole lives," says Levine. "Sometimes, we get stuck on that idea, that dream. We can't see the reality of what's really happening."

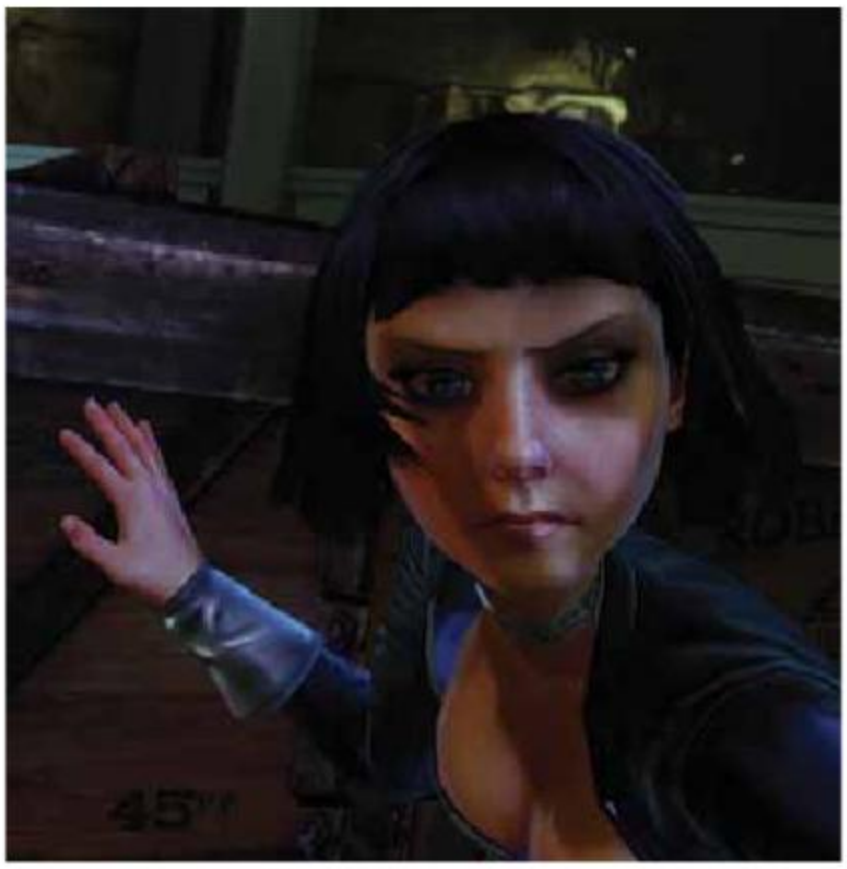
Eight years before he set foot in the first game studio he'd ever seen, Levine found his own Hollywood scriptwriting dreams crumbling like the walls of Rapture.

It was the late '80s. After impressing his playwright peers at Vassar College in New York, Levine moved to LA with the single wish to become a great film writer. His self-belief – an essential trait for any creative entrepreneur – had put his work under the eyes of the world's most powerful movie execs. The plan failed spectacularly.

> ***"I love it when developers say 'in our game we have 800 lines of dialogue'. I mean, who fucking cares?"***

Levine quickly found himself stranded from the industry he was desperately trying to be at the heart of; out of money, doubting his own talent, and fired from a last-chance writing gig. He had no choice but to crawl away from the Tinseltown dream. He was dejected. But worse, he was without purpose; a sense that his dream goal, though beautiful when achieved in his mind, was unrealistic.

Levine's journey from that world to the games industry was far from straight,



Bioshock Infinite is the most ambitious idea yet to come from the Boston-based Irrational Games

scattered as it was by moments of opportunism, walkouts, failure and hope. His career seems like it was always just minutes away from straying elsewhere; a wild goose chase of life's purpose, where game design was never the ultimate goal. Not at least until the eleventh hour.

He was working at, of all places, a New York computer consultancy firm when destiny caught up with him. Screaming out from the opened page of a games magazine was an advert, a vacancy post.

Looking Glass Studios – the house of System Shock and Warren Spector, the progenitor of Ion Storm and Irrational Games – just so happened to be looking for a new game designer. Coding experience an advantage. Hollywood contacts a necessity.

Today Levine is a rising star of the games industry; an icon-in-waiting. Some of the greatest craftsmen of the entertainment industries see *BioShock* – built under his leadership at Irrational Games – as a vital, modern inspiration. Cliff Bleszinski says the industry "warmed down before *Bioshock* came along". Gabe Newell said he had to ban the game from Valve's offices. Steven Spielberg was said to be addicted.

"*BioShock* is our passion at Irrational," says Levine. "It's our consuming life's purpose, it's what drives my life. For five years I've worked for it, and when you do what I do – and God bless my wife and her patience – there's not really a distinction between work and home. My team get emails from me at all hours. And calls. It's our lives."

PLAY RIGHT

But the designer – despite having built a game of award-winning narrative sophistication – doesn't agree that story is higher up the pecking order than gameplay. Levine is not, he suggests, trying to relive the Hollywood dream through code.

"I think my games fall into this interesting space between simulation and scripted elements. Our narratives are quite unique, but I can definitely say the story isn't more important to us than the game," he says.

> ***"Our goal with Infinite is to present a world that is so different, strange and weird, that also has elements of familiarity."***

"The two mediums are of completely different languages. It's why I don't do cut-scenes. Going down that road is dangerous; the focus is the play.

"I love it when developers say 'in our game we have 800 lines of dialogue'. I mean, who fucking cares? That's a standard? 'We have 600 hours of cut-scenes'. So what? As a writer, bulk is the easy part."

"Making content is easy. But leaving enough out, looking at everything as an interactive piece, that's the real ambition."

Irrational's *BioShock Infinite*, in terms of concept, is the most ambitious idea yet to come from the Boston-based Irrational. Studio Ghibli may have animated it, Jonathan Swift may have written it, but Irrational is going to build it; a breathtaking city in the sky. One buoyed above the clouds by air-balloons the size of football stadiums. A utopian retreat that somehow lost its civil values and, stranded miles above the earth, became a beautiful, ghostly prison.

It can only be said that, when it was demonstrated behind closed doors at this year's Gamescom, *BioShock Infinite* became one of those rare projects that leaves an industry unanimously awestruck. Even executives from direct rival companies urged *Develop* to take a look at it. Why? Hard to explain, they said. You just have to see it.

And yet one of the biggest challenges of the project came from how effortlessly beautiful the flying city of Columbia looks. Levine wants to turn this city, saturated as it is in fierce sunlight, into a vintage horror show.

He agrees it's an unconventional approach, but the payoff can be striking.

"Our goal with *Infinite* is to present a world that is so different, strange and weird, that also has elements of familiarity. The mixture can be even more effective.

"I was out the other night and saw this absolutely beautiful woman, and she turned her face and on the other side she had a… well, it must have been some kind of birth defect. What was striking about her is how she carried herself, because she was

beautiful, but the other side to her face stood out from it. When you see it, you stop for a second, it breaks your expectations of her being perfectly symmetrical.

"That mixture of the perfect and the strange really interests me as a game designer. It works so much better than plunging you into a world that's completely alien.

"With the first *BioShock*, everything was a dark corridor. Everything was one or two guys – shotgun, electrobolt, shotgun. That was a flaw, I think. We wanted to open up the world and change perceptions.

"Have you ever seen *Blue Velvet*? It opens on a shot of this beautiful, welcoming green grass field. And eventually you come to find an ear, sitting in the grass, ants crawling all over it. That's what we're going for.

"It's a huge challenge. But when Irrational Games start getting comfortable about what we are doing, we start getting uncomfortable about what we are doing."

DA VINCI CODEBASE

Technologically, Irrational is plunged into its own nightmare. *BioShock Infinite* is built with Unreal Engine 3, yet – like many studios that have been exploiting the engine for years – it's becoming hard to tell. The visual craftsmanship, and the sheer scale of the game, is remarkable.

Levine says there's no code sharing between what the studio had with the first *BioShock* to *Infinite*, not a single line.

"It's because we couldn't, not with this idea we had of a city in the sky," he says.

"Every building actually floats, we've knocked out a flight structure for them, and obviously the draw distance is a vast improvement on the first *BioShock*.

"We've also had a tech team build a deferred lighting engine that's not in Unreal, which can do dynamic lighting very economically."

Levine talks tech with a surprising degree of comfort. He was, admittedly, completely oblivious to how games were created when first hired at Looking Glass. It poses the question that perhaps, while coders and artists are the lifeblood of dev studios, a creative soul is needed at the beating heart.

> ***"Logan's Run inspired me. This perfect world where everyone had to die when they were 30. An amazing utopia with a rotten core."***

Levine's literary and filmic inspirations have a clear common theme too.

"George Orwell is my main influence," he says. "*Animal Farm* is the only book you'll ever need to read about politics. It's not the focus on communism itself that I love, but the notion that these sociological systems will get corrupted.

"In terms of film, actually I'd say *Fight Club* is a really interesting one. Not because of its studenty anti-society stance, but because of that great notion of the unreliable narrator.

"There's a TV series that inspired me as well. *Logan's Run*. I still remember the first time I watched it – where this perfect world was made under this one condition; everyone had to die when they were 30. It was just this amazing utopia with a rotten core. When I saw that I lost my shit."

It's these themes of corruption, of betrayal, of fallen idealised worlds that jump out from the cities Rapture and Columbia and into the players' minds. These ideas, and their execution, are central to why Levine has become such a key asset to the game industry.

He is a creative talisman, born to write scripts, who fell in love with an industry virtually void of good writers. The industry's execs should take note; *BioShock*'s avuncular Big Daddy mercenaries and Little Sister moral dilemmas have not proven to be difficult ideas to sell. *BioShock* is lucrative franchise.

In fact, *BioShock* was such a big commercial success that – in an ironic twist – those Hollywood execs took notice. The boy they once spat out from their incestuous clique now wanted him back. For Levine, it must have been quite a beautiful moment.

"I was offered the chance to make a game with a film director," he says. "A very talented film director. They said they really liked what I was doing and wanted to share it – that this project with creative leads from both game and film – was going to be amazing."

Join us, would you kindly?

Levine said no.

Bioshock Infinite was demonstrated behind closed doors at Gamescom – and left the industry awestruck

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A sense of Scaleform

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EPIC DIARIES: WHEN THE IPHONE WENT UNREAL P58

A sense of SCALEFORM

In-game menus are just words and symbols on a screen aren't they? The CEO of leading UI middleware firm Scaleform tells **Will Freeman** why that's far from the case...

Above: An example of the potential of UI beyond a traditional pause screen

For many, the notion of Scaleform is a bewildering one. Why buy in middleware for something as simple as menus? There must be a better use of time and money than embracing new technology for something so simple?

In reality, the fact is the user interfaces are changing, and Scaleform does a great deal more than let you place lists of words into pause screens. The art of UI is in flux, and Scaleform provides a tailoured canvas for that shift.

Sighting titles like *ModNation Racers*, *DeadSpace* and *Starcraft 2* as prime examples of creative UI implementation, Scaleform is keen to point out why good menus and interfaces can help games expand on their potential to engross.

"These teams put forth significant effort to design a rich UI experience which paid off, and helped result in highly successful titles," suggests Scaleform's president and CEO Brendan Iribe. "Although game UI has come a long way recently, it still has plenty of untapped potential in terms of both design and presentation. Scaleform is committed to providing game developers with the very latest and most powerful tools to take their UI to the next level."

The rich experience Iribe is referring to is that seen when UI does more than just menus. UI can be integrated into the game world, so that a player character can interact with the ammo crates or pockets, rather than just pour through arbitrary lists. Even within the remit of the traditional menu, there is capacity for flare and innovation, and cross over with the game world, either through continuity of design in parallel with the fictional universe, or by blurring the boundaries of the separate gameplay and option screens.

> ***"Although game UI has come a long way recently, it still has plenty of untapped potential in terms of both design and presentation."***
>
> Brendan Iribe, Scaleform

In fact the new school of UI design has been gathering pace for some time, and an ever savvy consumer is already getting comfortable with developers' more innovative offerings. As gamers' expectations rise, user interface creation has become a complex and challenging problem that demands expertise in many areas.

INTERFACE VALUE

Responding to the raising bar developers are faced with, and following years of development and working closely with numerous game studios, Scaleform has subsequently built what promises to deliver an optimised solution. The result is a tool that leverages the ever-popular Adobe Flash pipeline; a fact that is the result of careful consideration of numerous factors.

"Flash is the industry standard for high quality vector graphics and animation and is part of the Adobe Creative Suite, which provides a complete and proven artist/designer toolset," says Iribe, explaining Scaleform's proximity with the platform. "Due to its widespread use, Flash artists and

developers have the added advantage of an already extensive compendium of references and tutorials to draw upon, not to mention over a million-plus developer base."

Familiarity, flexibility and power; Flash's triple whammy of assets make Scaleform a tool that has besotted many developers.

IN THE HOUSE

The alternative to Scaleform is to create a proprietary UI system, which may tempt studios concerned by the amount of money lost to securing new tools, but keeping UI in house can be tedious, time-consuming and resource intensive.

With Scaleform, artists can harness the ever expanding Adobe toolset and work simultaneously with engineers, enabling a huge capacity for saving time and money.

"Using Scaleform allows developers to streamline production through our custom UI toolset and pre-built kits. Our tools are designed to help create triple-A quality game UI in half the time, with half the effort," promises Iribe.

"And, with our new out-of-the-box 3Di rendering, developers can go far beyond traditional 2D UI, delivering new cinematic quality experiences, including fully stereoscopic 3D interfaces, that were simply too complex and expensive for most developers to create in the past."

> ***"Using Scaleform allows developers to streamline production. Our tools are designed to help create triple-A quality game UI in half the time, with half the effort."***
>
> Brendan Iribe, Scaleform

With titles like *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, *Borderlands* and *Dragon Age: Origins* showcasing innovative UI powered by Scaleform, it's fairly clear what the tech offers. It minimises cost and time drain, whilst making menus a potential highlight of a given title's design.

www.scaleform.com

Scaling Up

Developing Scaleform hasn't been a walk in the park by any means, and the tool company president and CEO Brendan Iribe and his colleagues have crafted is the result of significant hard work so as to balance flexibility, power and ease of use. The job at Scaleform is never done, and the team there continue to fine tune and enhance the product, embracing new trends like stereoscopic 3D, and adding fresh features.

"As always, memory and performance challenges must be solved, and cross platform compatibility is required for wide spread adoption," says Iribe of the process of building the UI middleware. "In addition to highly optimised runtime engine, we now provide a complete memory and performance profiling toolset, Scaleform AMP, which lets developers quickly tune their content, and in the near future, will have full script debugging support."

PRODUCT: Scaleform
SPECIALITY: UI
KEY PRODUCTS: Scaleform GFx, Scaleform Video, Scaleform IME
EMAIL: info@scaleform.com
ADDRESS: Scaleform Corporation. 6305 Ivy Lane, Suite 310, Greenbelt, MD 20770

KEYRELEASE

CryEngine 3.2

PRODUCT: CryEngine
COMPANY: Crytek
PRICE: On request
CONTACT: www.crytek.com

Hitting its first birthday this month, Crytek's CryEngine is now available with stereoscopic 3D in the 3.2 SDK. **Stuart Richardson** caught up with the studio's director of global business development Carl Jones to discuss the past, present and 3D future of this cutting edge engine...

The third-dimension is very much in vogue these days. Gone are trips to the cinema marked by the understanding that for all the entertainment on offer, it was always going to be a very flat experience. Now, with a few lose coins exchanged for a pair of Rayban-esque shades that cause the entire auditorium to recite lines from The Blues Brothers, the long-elusive field of depth will show up in all of the latest Hollywood entertainment.

The games industry, like many others, has taken note of the new 3D trend, and has reacted to it quickly. The Nintendo 3DS is almost upon us, and tech and middleware firms like Nvidia and Scaleform have incorporated 3D tools and services into the products that they offer. At the forefront of the expanding group of games studios incorporating stereoscopic 3D capabilities into their propriatory technology which is being licenced out is Crytek.

Released last month, the 3.2 version of the CryEngine 3 SDK includes full stereoscopic 3D support for all supported platforms with what Crytek has called almost no performance impact or compromise on graphical quality. Developers are also not required to write any new code or to change any assets to take advantage of the 3D technology.

The CryEngine 3 Live Create allows for simultaneous editing across all supported platforms, running in 3D. The new engine is also easily capable of handling HD 3D, and has multiplatform native support for HDMI 1.4 stereo standard, frame-compatible formats for pre-HDMI 1.4 TVs, anaglyphic 3D and stereoscopic projection.

"We've been working on S3D at Crytek for a few years now – probably before most other developers, because we realised early on it would be a key feature for gaming, movies and simulation in the near future," explains director of CryEngine global business development Carl Jones.

> ***"Developers using CryEngine 3 can be certain that their product will look great in S3D."***
>
> Carl Jones, Crytek

"So we made a call to spend some time coming up with a new method that wouldn't compromise on quality. The result of our research is Screen Space Reprojection S3D; a new approach that gives us great stereo 3D with zero compromise, launched in CryEngine 3.2."

Not yet a year on from its original, 3D-free release date, CryEngine 3 containins such high-end features as volumetric, layer and view distance fogging; parametric skeletal animation, dynamic pathfinding, automated navigation mesh generation and high speed texture rendering, plans have also been put in place to bring a free-to-use engine version to market.

"Developers using CryEngine 3 can be certain that their product will look great in S3D without them expending any effort on implementation or asset production," Jones states.

"We build CryEngine 3 to ensure our developers can spend the maximum time possible on content creation. S3D adds a huge amount to interactive entertainment: immersion, depth, emotion and gameplay all benefit from S3D and the CryEngine 3 solution is display and hardware independent."

As for the future, nothing is going to be left to chance.

"We spend a lot of time and effort on research. We have a freedom at Crytek to experiment with new technologies, often ahead of the curve, as was the case with S3D," Jones smiles.

www.crytek.com

The future is bright

Crytek's Carl Jones has big visions for the future of handheld gaming.

"Handheld devices will soon have the power of current generation consoles; high powered gaming hardware will become commonplace in people's homes and in their pockets," he explains.

"This opens a world of opportunity to developers. We're also waiting for the global network infrastructure to be ready for truly widespread server based rendering, and it looks like this will happen very soon.

"Once this is achieved, platforms will no longer be an issue; everyone will be able to have the most powerful hardware to run games straight to your home. At this point all games will be able to use the highest end, bleeding edge technologies and gaming will never look back. It'll be like having a virtual, five-grand high end gaming rig wherever you want it."

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EPICDIARY

UNREAL ENGINE 3 COMES TO MOBILE

This month, I thought I'd venture away from the usual format of talking about some cool things our licensees are doing. Instead, I'm going to talk about how Unreal Engine 3 is now the most amazing mobile game engine on the planet and how it is already changing the face of mobile games forever.

On September 1st, we appeared onstage at the Apple Special Event to demonstrate *Project Sword*, our first UE3 game for iOS devices, and announce to the world that we are making UE3 available to iOS developers. If you did not see the event then I urge you to search YouTube for 'Apple Special Event Project Sword'.

That day, we released *Epic Citadel*, a free download on the iTunes App Store for recent iOS devices. *Epic Citadel* lets you explore an environment from *Project Sword* but more importantly provides a tiny glimpse into the exciting future of triple-A mobile games.

It shows off a stunning parade of visual effects that you likely have not seen before in a mobile environment, including bump offset mapping, normal mapping, texture blending with painted weight maps, global illumination and dynamic specular lighting with texture masks.

In its first ten days, *Epic Citadel* was downloaded by more than a million users. Here's a sampling of what the media had to say about what they saw:

"I certainly never thought I'd see graphics like that on a mobile game."

"Epic Games opened plenty of eyes with its beautiful looking swords-and-castle-exploring game demo."

"It's so exciting, I can't describe it. My iPhone 3GS is suddenly a handheld Xbox 360."

"Download Epic Citadel right this very second from the App Store. Genuinely speechless... well, apart from all the swearing."

"If you thought that games on the iPhone and iPod touch had to be silly-looking glorified minigames, Epic Games' new Project Sword may blow your mind."

"Seriously! I have a strange feeling everything's just changed."

I think the last two quotes illustrate something we at Epic have understood for a while now – that mobile gaming is quickly changing. Speaking about Apple TV at the event, Steve Jobs said, "the HD revolution is over, it happened, HD won. Everybody wants HD." I think this sentiment will apply to mobile gaming as well. That doesn't mean 2D games are going to cease to exist but, as more UE3-based mobile games appear, 3D games will need to deliver higher levels of graphical fidelity to remain competitive. It is clear that until people put their hands on an app like this they had no idea how powerful iOS devices are or how captivating a 3D experience they can deliver, and people want to have more experiences like this.

...THIS INCLUDES UDK

There are now more than 350,000 unique installations of the Unreal Development Kit and we're excited to announce that UDK will also support iOS devices in the near future. For more on this feel free to follow me, @MarkRein, on Twitter.

Above: Epic Citatel is a free download on the iTunes store, allowing consumers to explore the world of upcoming game Project Sword

UPCOMING EPIC ATTENDED EVENTS:

GDC Online
Austin, TX
October 6th - 8th, 2010

Montreal International Game Summit
San Francisco, CA
November 4th - 5th, 2010

IGDA Leadership Forum
San Francisco, CA
November 4th - 5th, 2010

Game Connection
Lyon, France
November 16th - 18th, 2010

Please email: mrein@epicgames.com for appointments.

To discuss anything raised in this column or general licensing opportunities for Epic Games' *Unreal* engine, contact: **mrein@epicgames.com**

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Mark Rein is vice president of Epic Games based in Raleigh, North Carolina. Since 1992 Mark has worked on Epic's licensing and publishing deals, business development, public relations, academic relations, marketing and business operations.
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UNITYFOCUS

Global round-up

It's a busy time of year for Unity. The tech company's own **Thomas Grové** brings you a run down of all the latest developments for its engine around the world – and the latest on a wealth of new resources for Unity users…

Unity and EA announce three to six-year strategic partnership
Building on the positive experience developing *Tiger Woods Online* with Unity, EA has decided to adopt the Unity platform for use on multiple franchises and genres.

The new enterprise licence will give every EA studio and developer across the globe full access to the entire range of Unity products for web, mobile, consoles and beyond.
unity3d.com

Unity announces GPM Studio as official Korean reseller
We're super happy to announce that we've partnered with GPM Studio in Korea. They've really shown a lot of initiative and our relationship has been growing ever closer. They even organised a seminar in Seoul last month that was attended by Unity CEO David Helgason, VP of Strategy Brett Seyler, and myself. Also presenting was Younger Jo, founder of Slime Marmalade and creator of the hit iPhone game *RPG Snake*. The seminar had over 400 attendees, which is about how big Unite was last year – Korea is clearly becoming an ever-important part of the global Unity community.
unity3dkorea.com

Unity 3 ships
I can't say with 100 per cent certainty – I have to write these articles about a month in advance – but in all likelihood Unity 3 is running loose in the wild and being used by 250,000 registered developers. I just installed Release Candidate 1 yesterday and I must say that it feels really solid. Unity 3 will be shipping with the *Boot Camp* 3rd person soldier demo that has been seen in promotional materials; like other Unity demos, the art, scripts, and shaders will be free to use commercially in any projects made with Unity.
unity3d.com/3

Unity powers Scion Canada's Premium Car Configurator
Japanese automotive advertisement production powerhouse Works Zebra chose Unity for the car configuration tool on Scion's Canadian website.

Works Zebra's Jaja Ishibashi had this to say: "We have been pushing realtime 3D for over 10 years in the web space and have been creating content back since VRML. We believe that an experience is as good as both its technology and its authors. We have been searching for technology that will take us that extra mile on the web, and actually have invested millions into creating our own, but we chose Unity to be our flavour of choice for the web. Unity's editor and its modularity with custom shaders was easily adopted by our team – it made prototyping quick and we were able to spend most of our time tweaking the experience, where typically we are spending 80 per cent of our time creating and fixing, and very little time tweaking."
scionnation.ca

Unite just one month away
It's not too late to join us in Montreal for the fourth annual Unity user conference. The event will be keynoted by the always profound and entertaining Jesse Schell and will include three days and three tracks of technical presentations, business networking, and post-mortems with some of the world's top Unity developers, as well as the entire Unity staff.

Unite runs from November 10th to 12th, directly following the Montreal International Games Summit (running from the 8th to 9th).
unity3d.com/unite

New Unity books:
- *Unity 3D Game Development by Example* by Ryan Henson Creighton, published by Packt Publishing
- *Creating 3D Game Art for the iPhone with Unity iOS: Featuring modo and Blender Pipelines* by Wes McDermott, published by Focal Press

New websites:
- Will Goldstone, author of the first Unity book (*Unity Game Development Essentials, Packt Publishing*), has a new website dedicated to teaching bite sized modules that can be mixed and matched to solve challenges.
unity3dstudent.com
- Design3 is a subscription based site created by Noesis Interactive, who create professional courseware for Universities. It has over 200 Unity specific videos and more on the way. Whether an educator, a student, or a business, you can check out their free trial and see if it works for you.
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HEARD ABOUT
Crackdown 2

John Broomhall talks to audio director Kristofor Mellroth, about the audio in Ruffian's eagerly anticpated sequel…

THIS MONTH'S FEATURED SOUNDTRACK:
Crackdown 2

DEVELOPER:
Ruffian/Microsoft

PLATFORM:
Xbox360

When Kristofor Mellroth enrolled at music recording school in 1995, he probably never dreamt that in just a few year's time he'd be heading up as huge and complex video game audio production employing a plethora of US and UK talent.

Mellroth came to games via boom operating, film sound mixing, working as a temp tech repairing original Xbox devkits and going on the road with Seamus Blackley as demo guy. In fact, an eclectic combination of technical, creative and business experience set him up perfectly for his current audio directorial role at Microsoft within an audio team deadly serious about excellence. No surprise then that his last *Crackdown* project scooped a BAFTA.

Mellroth's strong passion and high commitment are self-evident as he enthuses about *Crackdown 2*'s audio: "I felt we could improve over *CD1* making something even more memorable. A special focus was the authoring environment – I wanted 'best in class' tools. Using Audiokinetic's Wwise middleware turned out one of our best early decisions and we pushed it to the max using Soundseed Air and Whoosh a great deal. It's a big part of why the game sounds the way it does. Competition in the middleware market works to all our benefit and we have no specific mandate about tech but as a concept, audio middleware makes a lot of sense to me – fully featured right out of the box with a solution that would take years to develop from scratch. New features come online as you make your game and your audio programmers can look at game features and not get bogged down in tech support."

Mellroth's team used straightforward logic in scripting extensively within the audio tools to achieve a vast amount of detail in replay, with the setting up of switches and real-time parameter controls enabling them to interpret sound triggers accompanied with additional game state/event/character information – all in complex ways using conditional audio choices – and all within the sound designer's remit and technical control.

TOOLING UP

The game is awash with examples where this has yielded positive benefits – too many to mention – but the principle is clear. Great tools have allowed creatives to roll up their sleeves and harness the console's power providing an intricate soundscape without

> ***"Competition in the middleware market works to all our benefit and we have no specific mandate about tech, but as a concept, audio middleware makes a lot of sense to me."***
>
> Kristofor Mellroth, Microsoft Game Studios

waiting around for programming staff to add a feature or implement a replay function.

This level of control has been critical in delivery of an improved NPC dialogue system. Mellroth says: "Tons of dialogue categories were recorded for *CD1* – some you never heard and some you heard all the time. They had only five variations, duplicated across all NPCs – 'I think I need to pee,' being one of the worst offenders. This time all NPC responses were focused on player actions letting us circumvent the AI system. We watch what the player does and when, and hand out response lines to the NPCs. The player hears quick relevant responses to their behaviour creating the illusion of intelligence."

Audio-wise, the obvious danger of densely action-packed games is cacophony. Mellroth and his team gave quality time and attention to setting up dynamic mix behaviours and then gathered together key team members for a solid period of dedicated mixing and balancing. Mellroth explains: "It starts with voice management clamping at master buss level and then at sub-buss level, limiting how may sounds an object generates – for example you don't want to hear all enemy footsteps so we clamp to four and kill the oldest. We allow 100 voices in the retail release – unclamped it's 500. Most are culled for aesthetic reasons – to mitigate the cacophony issue. Then there's tons of micro-ducking."

The final mix phase took place Microsoft's Sound Lab facilities for five solid ten-hour days. "We split our time between the large theatre and the smaller, quieter 'Mix1' for comparative listening. The driving force was to achieve dynamic range – we have 24dB between footsteps and very large close explosions. As well as the technical basics of ensuring you're not overloading the sub and generally getting a good balance, a game like *Crackdown* adds complexity with all the dynamic mixing and also things like radius thresholds for determining when you start to hear a sound - critical in co-op."

Above: Crackdown 2's audio team went to great lengths to better the superb work on the first game

John Broomhall is an independent audio director, consultant and content provider
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www.johnbroomhall.co.uk

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The Develop in Liverpool Conference happens next month – bringing together the brightest and best developers from across the UK for an inspiring day of learning, sharing ideas and networking.

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Just Announced!

KEYNOTE

Seeing is Believing : 3D a New Creative Medium for Games

Mick Hocking, Senior Director, Sony Computer Entertainment Europe

Expect case studies of 3D games, highlighting the lessons learned from converting many of SCE's leading titles to 3D. A look at the developing 3D market and insight into why games are the killer content for the 3D revolution. Plus, what it takes to convert your game to 3D, and how 3D has changed the visual language of the screen.

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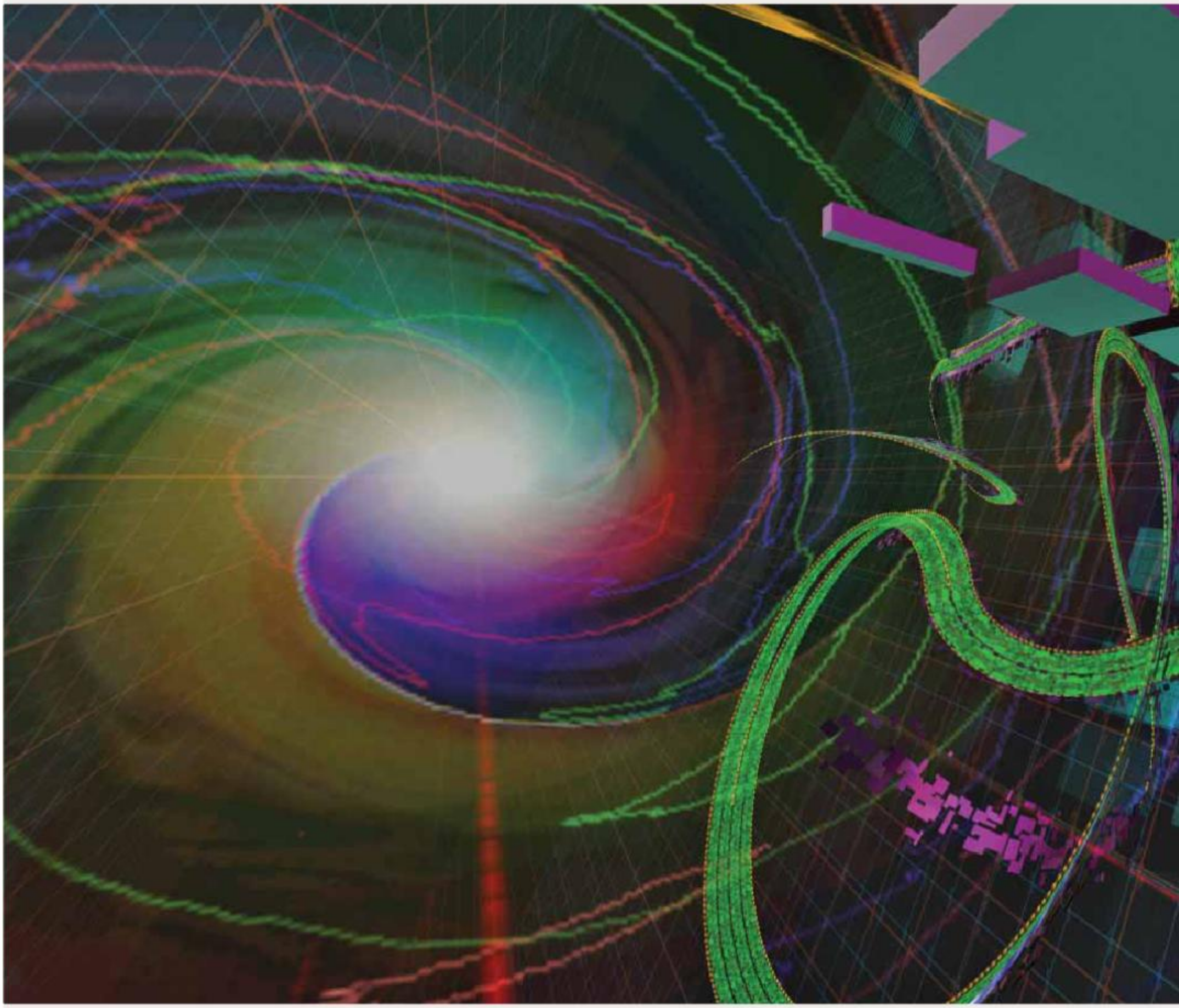
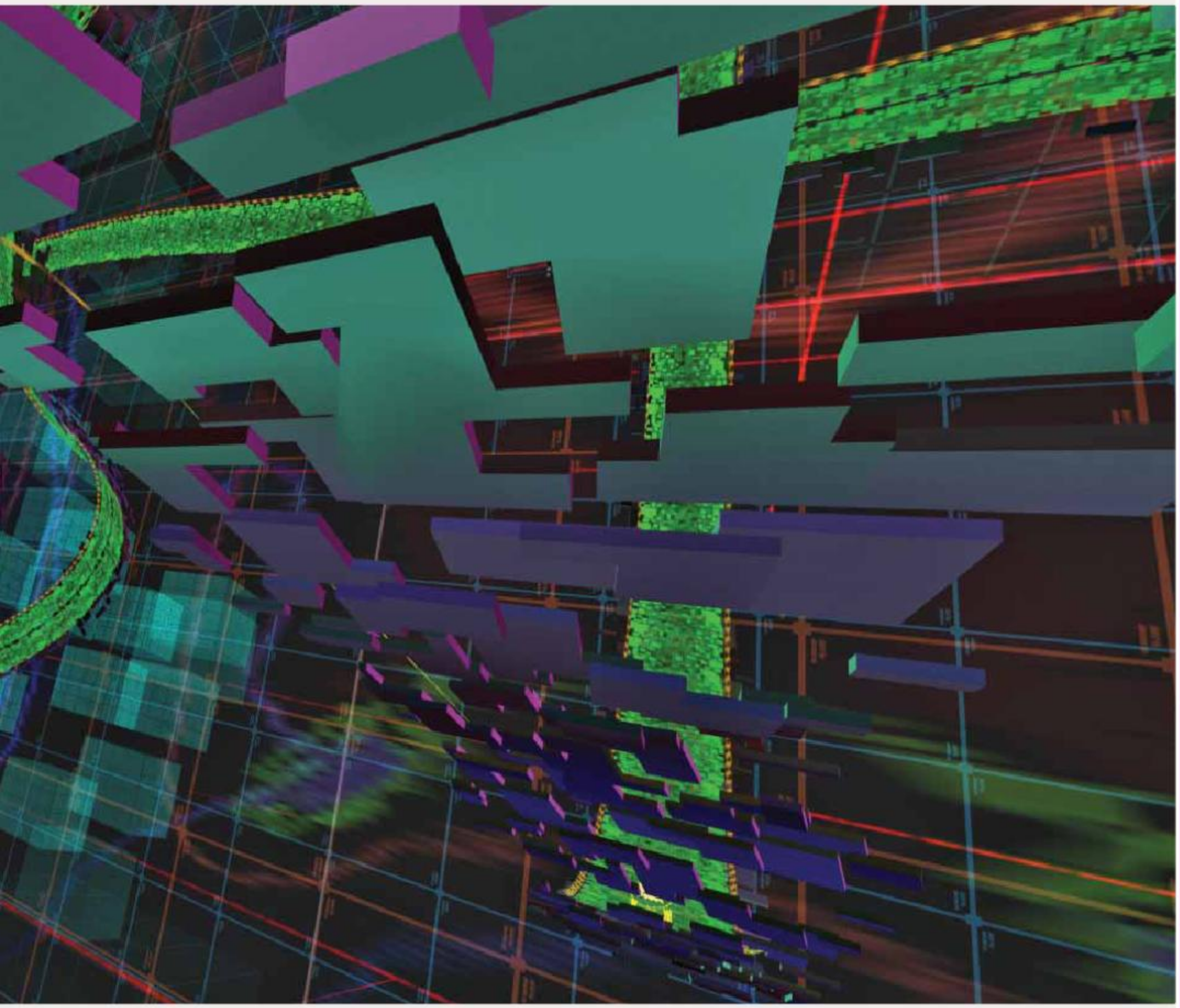


Duncan Harris presents the latest entry in his ongoing series looking at specially-captured screenshots that showcase game art at its best…



F-Zero GX

Fans of *F-Zero GX* delight in inventing reasons for the existence and layout of Phantom Road. Is it being sucked into a black hole? Is it cyberspace? Was it designed by man or machine? One thing's for sure: in a game obsessed with the 'rhythm' of the galaxy's fastest and most electrifying racer, this is its purest expression. Recognised as one of the best-looking GameCube games, it owes much to the attention-grabbing demands of its other platform, the coin-op, and the Triforce hardware developed by Namco, Sega and Nintendo.

Tools and tricks we used to get this screenshot: the Dolphin GameCube emulator running a legitimate rip of the NTSC version (EAN: 0045496960926), together with the free look hack of its current OpenGL graphics plug-in. The game's heads-up display was removed by 'blanking' (making transparent) all of its textures and a great deal of the title's text, before injecting the new ones at runtime.

www.deadendthrills.com

Dead End Thrills is a website and resource dedicated to the art of video games. It believes this art is too easily overlooked thanks to factors including technology, design and the 'fast food culture' of modern play.

Its galleries feature over 5,500 lovingly taken, watermark-free screenshots which are free to download and use. Elsewhere, it features interviews with many of today's leading artists and designers.

Studio: Amusement Vision
Publisher: Nintendo
Year: 2003
Capture format: GameCube (via PC)

LIVING WITH BEING WRONG

Heard of Extreme Programming? What about Extreme Game Development? Silverball Studios' **Andy Krouwel** talks us through how he reshaped his coding methodology to form a new discipline for making games…

Hello, I'm Andy. I'm a game developer, and I'm wrong. I'm wrong about when the game's going to be finished, I'm wrong about how it works, I'm wrong about how it's going to look, I'm wrong about what features it's going to have.

I'm frequently wrong to think that my code is even syntactically valid C++. Wrong, wrong, wrong and wrong.

But you see, it turns out that everybody's wrong at pretty much every level, and if we accept being wrong and try to make ourselves just slightly less wrong at every step it turns out all right.

Here at Silverball Studios in Oxfordshire – formerly Fuse Games – we use our own system of Extreme Game Development (XGD), derived from the mainstream Extreme Programming (XP) method to deal with being wrong. With half a dozen on-budget, on-time, no-crunch games under our belt, it seems to be working.

So where are we wrong, and where could we be less wrong?

TO THE EXTREME

Firstly, we're wrong if we think we're engineers. Engineers describe what they want to build, then work backwards from there figuring out the steps needed to build it. This gives an efficient and accurate plan, with a minimum of fuss. Follow the steps, build the thing, job done. While this is a splendid way of building bridges, it's a terrible way of building games.

Finished games never look like the original plan. They can't because you don't really know how it's going to play until you play it. So don't worry about it. Getting it right at the very start is philosophically impossible, wasted effort, fool's gold. Instead begin with an idea, some concepts, a kernel of a game to develop from.

Make it cool, make it exciting, make it inspirational, make it (conveniently) the kind of thing you'd put in your pitch to a publisher; just don't feel the need to flesh it out too much as it'll be wrong.

With the kernel decided, we jump straight in. We have to find the eventual game that's going to come out of this idea. To do that, we need something working and playable as soon as possible. That way we can quickly discover which were bad ideas, and which were good, and even think up some even better ones along the way. But we're not completely rash, before we start coding we of course do some planning.

Oh, what's the point? Of planning, I mean. Well, to have a reasonably detailed idea of what you're making, and how long it's going to take. It is a form of peering into the future, and that gets murkier and more wrong the further you look. Because of this we split our planning into broad-and-vague, and detailed-and-specific.

BROAD-AND-VAGUE

Let's talk broad-and-vague first. Our concept is divided into individual features, called 'stories'. Each gets its own index card with a short title. They don't have to be too detailed ('multiplayer' is a perfectly good story) because we can split them up later. Each story gets a rough (because it's wrong) effort estimate called the cost.

> ***"It turns out that everybody's wrong at pretty much every level, and if we accept being wrong and try to make ourselves just slightly less wrong at every step it turns out all right."***

HOW DO WE DECIDE WHAT TO DO?

This is the job of another member of the team, the 'customer'. In traditional XP this is literally a representative of the person paying for the system. In XGD it's typically the project lead, or producer.

They get a fortnight's worth of budget to spend on the stories they want to see in the next, working game in two weeks. Unpicked features go in a pile for future versions. In this way we concentrate only on the most important features, and are constantly re-reviewing what is essential, and what is only nice to have.

DETAILED PLANNING

Now we know what we'll be doing, detailed planning can begin on those stories and those stories only. This saves effort doing detailed planning into stories that may well never happen. Each story is split into individual tasks of no more than a few hours' work, each of which goes on its own index card, with discussion notes and diagrams to flesh out what is needed.

Tasks and time estimates are then assigned in a simple way – each developer grabs a biro and writes their name on the tasks they most want to do, adding an estimate of how long it will take. This results in surprisingly few fist-fights, just the occasional rebalancing. As each estimate is only a few hours and is made by the person who's going to do the work, it's as not-wrong as you can hope for.

And that's planning. It takes somewhere between a morning and a day, but at the end we have a chunk of work that we can reasonably expect to complete in the next fortnight, a detailed spec, and a time estimate that at least has a good chance of being accurate.

14 DAYS LATER…

At the end of every fortnight a polished, playable, bug-free game containing only those features listed on the cards, and suitable for sending to the publisher for feedback, is produced. This forms the basis for planning the next two weeks' development, bringing back the untouched story cards and adding any new ones we've thought up during development. This rapid iteration lets us focus on what's good, and trim what's not. Some features never get implemented and stay at the bottom of the pile for the whole development, but every two weeks we're doing what adds the most to the game, and at least we know we didn't waste any time on features that ultimately weren't needed

One other thing comes in to every few planning meetings – a retrospective. This gives us the chance to reflect on what went well, what we could do better, and how we should adjust our development methodology in future to avoid these problems. You could call it a post-mortem, but that would rather unfortunately imply that something had died.

FINE-TUNING

But don't think that's the lesson over – don't just grab your task cards and disappear to your cubicles. That is not what happens next. Just because we know what we're doing doesn't mean we'll do it right, so XGD has a number of features to reduce Development Wrongness.

■ **1. Test Driven Development.** This one takes some getting used to, but pays enormous dividends. Before writing a function in the game we make a little automated test that will check that it's working. Once we see it failing, which you'd hope it did because we've not written the code yet, we write the code and watch the test pass. Hurrah. Or not, because often either the code or the test were wrong, but at least we noticed.

Once written that test keeps being run for the rest of the project. If ever your original code stops working – well, you know about it straight away, not when some unfortunate player tries it in several months time.

Writing good tests takes practice. You don't want every change to a class to need a change to all the tests. We aim to test all our public functions, but trust the private stuff to do the work. In this way we only have to change the tests when we change the class interface, and it can implement the functionality any way it wants.

It's important to know that automated tests do not replace QA and playtesting, but they make sure you're building the system on solid foundations. Reported bugs are tackled the same way, with a test that exposes the bug first, then the fix. This makes sure it doesn't rear its head again.

■ **2. It Always Works.** Although we have polished versions at the end of every two weeks, we can take a working build at any time. We have a machine dedicated to building every configuration, and running every test all day every day. If your check-in stops it working, you fix it immediately. Build failure is subtly flagged by a booming proclamation from an electronic Brian Blessed we keep in the corner.

Bugs are also fixed as soon as they are found, taking priority over starting new tasks. This constant fixing prevents the large build-up of problems at the end of a project, and keeps our estimates accurate as bug-fixing time gets built into the schedule.

■ **3. Don't Repeat Yourself.** In code, this is just good practice. You don't copy and paste code; you refactor into a common function. That way bugs are more likely to be noticed, and when they're fixed in one place they're fixed everywhere. It's always worth taking the time to do something properly.

In wider development terms this means automating any donkey work. We have autocomplete, macros for many common operations, shell scripts for art and build processing and so on. The computer is wrong far less often than a bored developer.

■ **4. Pair Programming.** XGD's most unusual practice is to have programmers sitting next to each other at the same development station, working on the same task card. One has the keyboard 'driving', while the other is 'navigating' – a process that involves thinking about the design, fielding questions, spotting mistakes, using the devkit for testing, finding advice on the internet and so on.

Pairs swap roles frequently, with one developer writing a test and the other writing the code to pass it. During the day the member of the pair who isn't signed up for the current task will swap onto a different task, so developers also move around the room.

Although this may seem like it should reduce productivity, it provides many benefits. Code has to be clear enough to be understood by another person, and many bugs at the design level are caught before the cursor leaves the edit line. It is slower to produce code, but having at least two sets of eyes look over everything means that you rarely have to come back to it later. You also don't hit a wall; There's always someone with fresh ideas and a new perspective that can get things moving again.

With each coder on every task, knowledge of the whole system percolates through the group. This stops duplicate code being written, and means that work can always continue through illness or holiday.
Artists also perform pairing, although of a looser kind where they share a desk so that they can see what the other is doing and get advice if needed.

All these techniques reduce our level of wrongness, and so our risk. The game is on time and on budget because you can always stop when the deadline arrives and it'll be working. It might not have all the features you wanted, but those you do have will be of production quality, not rushed for a deadline.

> ***XGD's most unusual practice is to have programmers sitting next to each other at the same development station, working on the same task card.***

A subtler, but useful benefit is improved developer confidence and morale. Progress is visible, tangible. You know you're going to hit your ship date.

You know the change you just made didn't break the game. It can actually be played almost immediately, getting better story by story. Good ideas can be added at any point in the process. Involvement in the planning process gives a sense of empowered control, rather than detached helplessness.

For similar reasons, the publisher is happier. They can see the game make progress and actually play it.

Corrections can be easily incorporated. The game will be ready on schedule, and there are no nasty surprises.

Sounds like it's perfect.

Well, it is good, and it's the first system I've used as a developer that feels like it was made for software, not circuits or bridges. However, there are some drawbacks.

Some aspects of games are just very difficult to write tests for. How do you reliably and quickly test that a random element in a feature is working? Brrr. Still, having some tests is better than none, and it's important to remember that you still need QA, it's just that they get to find the interesting bugs not the basic stuff.

Also while it's a highly efficient system for developing software, other important jobs such as coming up with new game ideas, or creative tinkering with better ways of doing things will be missed unless you explicitly schedule time for them.

During 'dead' times, like a long re-compilation, you generally talk to your partner, rather than browse newsgroup discussions or the web. While this is admirably sociable, you can also lose awareness of the wider world.

Scale is also a question. There are a dozen of us in our team, and we all work in in the same (admittedly large) room.

It's very easy for each person to interact with everyone else. Because we swap pairs at least twice a day, it's easy for everyone to have a good idea what's going on in their own discipline, and a fair idea what's happening in the other.

I doubt it would work well if there were two-dozen or more of us, or if we were spread across multiple locations. In such a situation it'd be better to parcel up jobs into chunks, then use the XGD method on the smaller sections.

All told, I love developing with XGD and I'd find it hard going back to the old hack-it-and-hope, or plan-then-ignore techniques.

I'm still wrong a lot – we all are – but at least I know that it can be put right, and at the end of the development cycle I know there's going to be a good game because I've already played it.

www.silverballstudios.com

EXTREME GAME DEVELOPMENT
TIPS & TRICKS

Planning numbers
Who is best placed to tell how much effort a story will take? The person who is going to do it, so it's a principle that those with the most knowledge decide the relative cost of the stories. After a brief discussion of the feature and its scope, with relevant points noted every developer decides on their time estimate by choosing an appropriate card from their planning deck. Cards are then revealed, and if there's a large range then the lowest and highest estimators get to put their case, often highlighting problems with the story or shortcuts we could take, and the estimating happens again. Numbers quickly converge, and an egg-timer stops the system devolving into endless debate. Oh, artists and coders give separate estimates as their time usage differs so wildly. The numbers on the cards in the planning deck follow the fibonacci sequence, as the accuracy gets more wrong the larger the task.

Planning points
How many points can the customer spend? Well, it's a bit of a guess at the start of a project, but when we repeat this process, as we will every fortnight, the size of the next fortnight's budget is the same as the total for the completed stories from the previous fortnight. Over time, this compensates for estimation problems, illness, bugs and so on.

Progress tracking
The story and task cards go onto a board in the development area in priority order. When a task is started, it is moved to the active area so everyone can see what is being worked on. When complete, it moves to the done column. When all tasks for a story are complete the project lead reviews it, then the story card is also done. At the end of each day every developer adjusts their estimates up or down to reflect how much work remains. The total hours left are added up, and this goes on a chart on the wall so we can see if we're going to get it all done on time. If not, then the bottom story will get bumped off the chart. It's better to have fewer, complete features than a larger number of buggy, half-finished ones.

Andy Krouwel is currently lead programmer at Silverball Studios. He has been programming for ever, roughly, and has developed games for Nintendo, Atlus and Ubisoft

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Studio News

This month: Team 17, Pitbull Studio Limited, Zattikka, MTV

Paul Bray and Alan Perrie are the two latest recruits at *Worms* studio Team 17.

Bray has become the firm's finance and operations director, while Perrie will now serve as head of global marketing.

The hirings come as part of substantial management shift at Team 17, which has also encompassed several in-house promotions.

Debbie Bestwick has been promoted to the dual roles of managing director and sales and marketing director, and Martin Brown will serve as business development director.

Paul Kilburn has become head of production and John Dennis will serve as head of design, while Mark Baldwin is now community manager.

www.team17.com

Pitbull Studios Limited has hired James Parr as its new technical director and Jef Hardy as design director.

The studio, which first opened this July, was founded by former Pitbull Syndicate and Midway Newcastle man Robert Troughton.

Parr and Hardy both worked at Pitbull Syndicate, where Parr was a co-founder with Troughton. He has over 20 years industry experience, having worked on the *Test Drive* series, *Ferrari Challenge* and *Wheelman*.

Following the hirings, Pitbull announced its first game contract as a circus-themed game set to use the next generation of motion controllers.

"We were awarded the project because of the level of expertise we have within the company – for something like this our partners, who we can't reveal just yet, needed to be sure they chose the right people for the job," Troughton said.

"Choosing us simply removes the risk for them. For us, it allows us to hit the ground running with our new studio."

www.3biz.co.uk/pitbull/

Peter Jones and Joel Breton have joined UK-based casual games studio Zattikka as executive producer and EVP of North American operations respectively.

Jones has moved to Zattika from Codemasters, where he served as director of production development. He will now be managing Zattikka's expanding portfolio.

Breton has worked in the games industry since 1994 with Sega, GT Interactive, Bethesda, Take-Two and MTV Networks.

"Hiring Joel gives us access to his wealth of product and industry knowledge and kick-starts our presence in the US, which is a huge market for us," said Zattikka CEO Tim Chaney.

www.zattikka.com

Growing social gaming firm Bigpoint is entering a rapid phase of workforce expansion, with a goal to add 350 to its San Francisco studio.

The German-born company this year expanded its office network to the US.

Now just six months later, Bigpoint wants to grow the studio by some 80 staff.

"Coming to San Francisco has helped us quickly enter and begin competing in the North American online gaming market," said company CEO Heiko Hubertz.

Bigpoint currently employs over 500 people across its studio network in San Francisco, Malta and Berlin.

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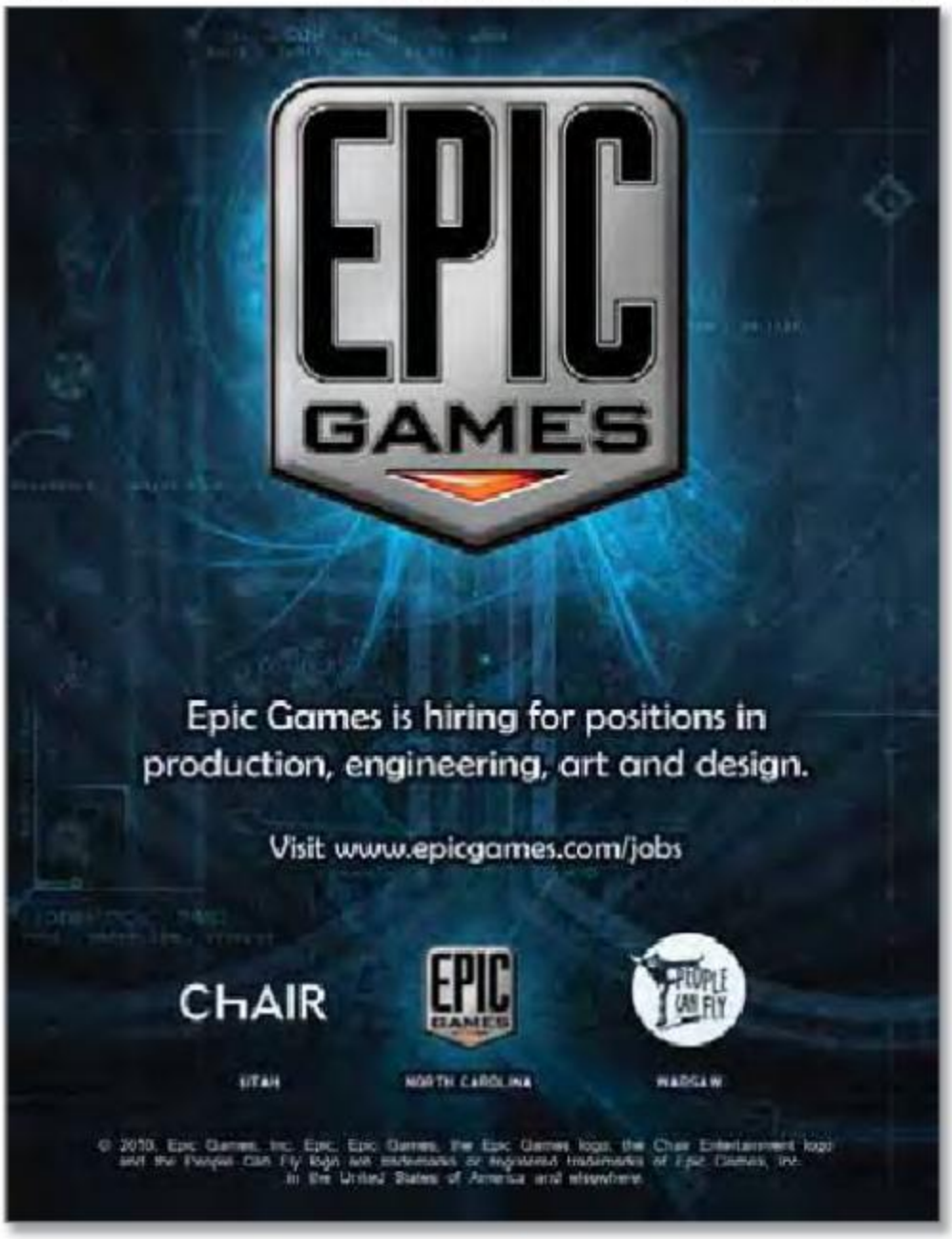
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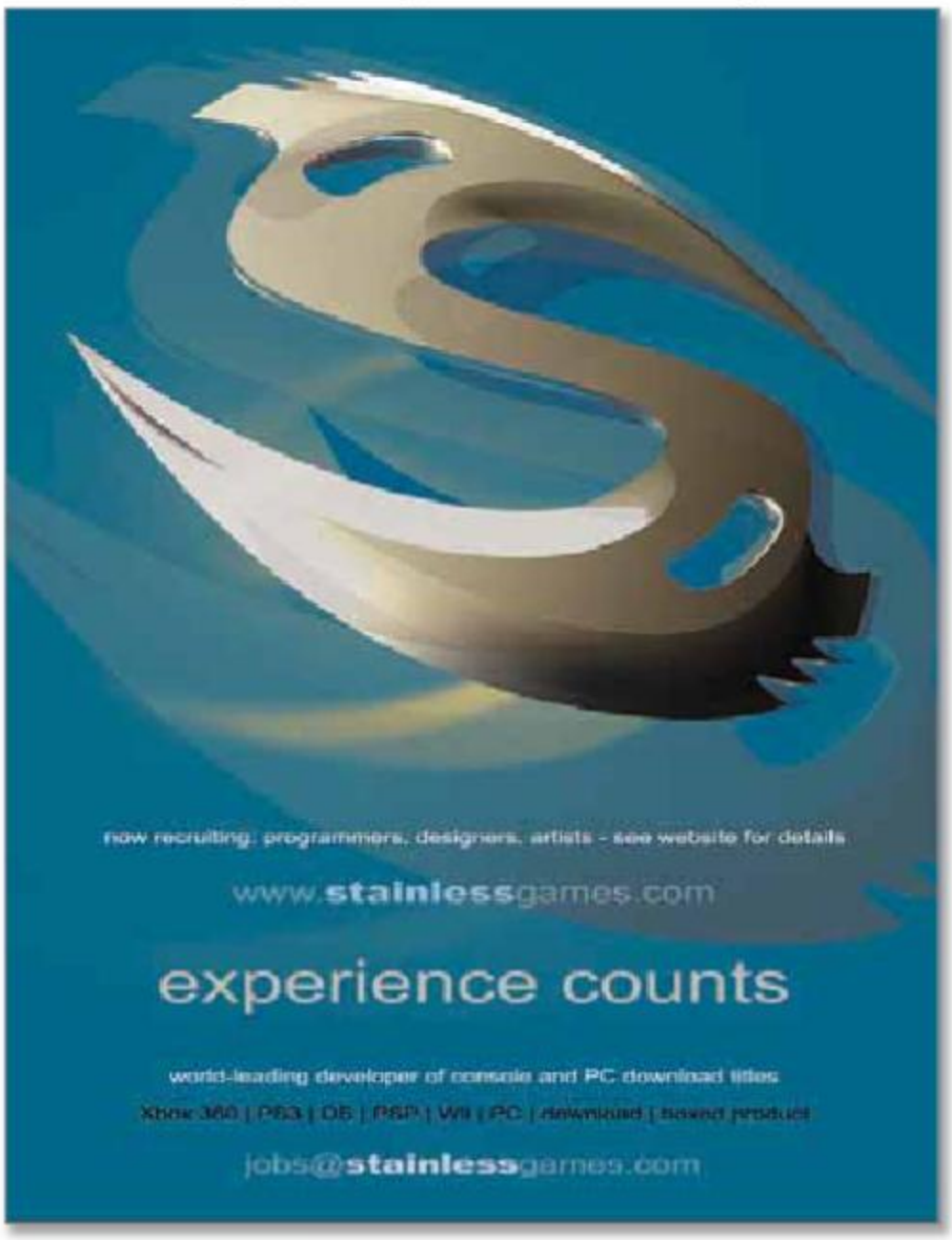
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Studio Spotlight

SCE CAMBRIDGE STUDIO

SCE Cambridge Studio was originally formed in July 1997 when SCEE acquired the Millennium development studio from Cyberlife Ltd. Roughly 75 to 90 people are currently working at the studio under the long time boss James Shepherd.

The first titles from the new SCE Cambridge were the acclaimed and hugely popular *MediEvil* 1 and 2 on the PS1 back in 1998 and 2000. These were quickly followed-up by *C-12: Final Resistance* in 2001, *Primal* in 2003 and *Ghosthunter* in 2004, all of which had strong sales and helped the studio build up a well earned reputation for hard-work and consistency.

In 2005 the studio returned to its best-loved series to date with *MediEvil: Resurrection* for the PSP. This made way for an impressive licence acquisition the following year when SCE Cambridge released the BAFTA nominated *24: The Game*, for which it worked very closely with IP owners 20th Century Fox.

The studio kept active, and was heavily involved in the PlayTV project in 2008, which brought a set-top box to the PS3 that allowed users to watch, pause and record free digital TV through their console, and marked a move into a more peripheral and casual-focussed era for the firm. This led on to the Playstation 3 Move title TV Superstars, out this month.

Today the studio develops titles for all PlayStation platforms, some of the latest of which include the Develop award-winning *LittleBigPlanet* on the PSP, and the upcoming TV Superstars, which will utilise the hotly-anticipated PS Move motion controller. SCE Cambridge has also worked in close collaboration with other studios on titles, such as with Ninja Theory on the critically lauded *Heavenly Sword*.

The life of SCE Cambridge has been anything but dull, and when the firm has taken on quality IP developed either in-house or aquired externally, it consitently delivers a profitable and exciting product, and frquently an outstanding one. Having built up to a run of top-quality output, it has definitely positioned itself as one to watch over the coming year.

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Cambridge
Cambs
UK

W: worldwidestudios.net/cambridge

Tools News

This month: OpenFeint, BlitzTech and OnLive

Social games platform OpenFeint has announced the upcoming release of PlayTime, a multiplayer technologies set for mobile developers using the yet-to-be-launched OpenFeint 3.0.

The new suite will come in two separate SDK's, Casual Games and Core Games, each with slightly differing API's and architecture for their relative markets, and each will support real-time multiplayer with voice chat across iOS and Android.

The Casual Games PlayTime SDK will include drop in widgets for displaying progress, an embedded VoIP client for group voice chat, a lobby, a matchmaking system for starting sessions, and a synchronized event system for passing data between games.

PlayTime for Core Games is built in partnership with Exit Games and provides a robust architecture for 16 player server authoritative multiplayer games, with a group voice chat system for team coordination, as well as a skill based lobby and matchmaking system.

PlayTime will launch later this year as part of OpenFeint 3.0. OpenFeint will be holding a private beta program in the intervening time.

www.openfeint.com

Ansca Mobile has launched a pair of new mobile tools in the form of the upgraded Corona SDK and the Corona Game Edition kit.

Previously an iPhone only platform, the Corona SDK now lets developers build cross-platform titles for both iOS and Android using the same code set, offering the potential for significant time savings.

The new Corona SDK also automatically scales graphics for each distinct platform, removing the need for users to tackle rescaling manually.

"Developers now want to build their apps for multiple platforms," suggested Ansca Mobile co-founder and CTO Walter Luh. "With the new versions of Corona, we are making it easier, quicker, and less costly for developers to target multiple platforms while still maintaining utmost quality and performance in their apps."

anscamobile.com

BlitzTech has announced that its middleware and development tools now include full functionality for Kinect on Xbox 360 and Move for PS3.

UK-based studio Blitz has used its proprietary tech suite on upcoming Kinect and Move-based titles *Yoostar2* and *The Biggest Loser: Ultimate Workout*, as well as other yet-to-be-announced games.

"Our in-house technology team has always thrived on a challenge. The amazing variety of Kinect and Move titles that we've signed up over the last year has enabled us to really experiment with the capabilities of these new devices," said Blitz Games Studios' technical director Richard Hackett.

"We're incredibly excited about the potential of both systems and we've already received some great feedback on our work so far."

www.blitzgamesstudios.com/blitztech/

OnLive is offering its SDK and a range of tools to help indie devs port their work to the cloud gaming platform.

The firm said that OnLive gives developers a unique opportunity to release their games simultaneously across PC, Mac and home TVs – with all the game data being streamed using some highly sophisticated cloud computing technology.

"By leveraging an open PC architecture, game developers can now release their game on an exciting new platform with a minimal amount of effort," explained OnLive vice president John Spinale.

The platform now hosts a range of widely applauded and award winning indie titles such as *World of Goo*, *Trine* and *The Maw*.

World of Goo developer 2D Boy had high praise for the new technology.

"We're going to see things with OnLive that were not possible before," Spinale said.

www.onlive.com

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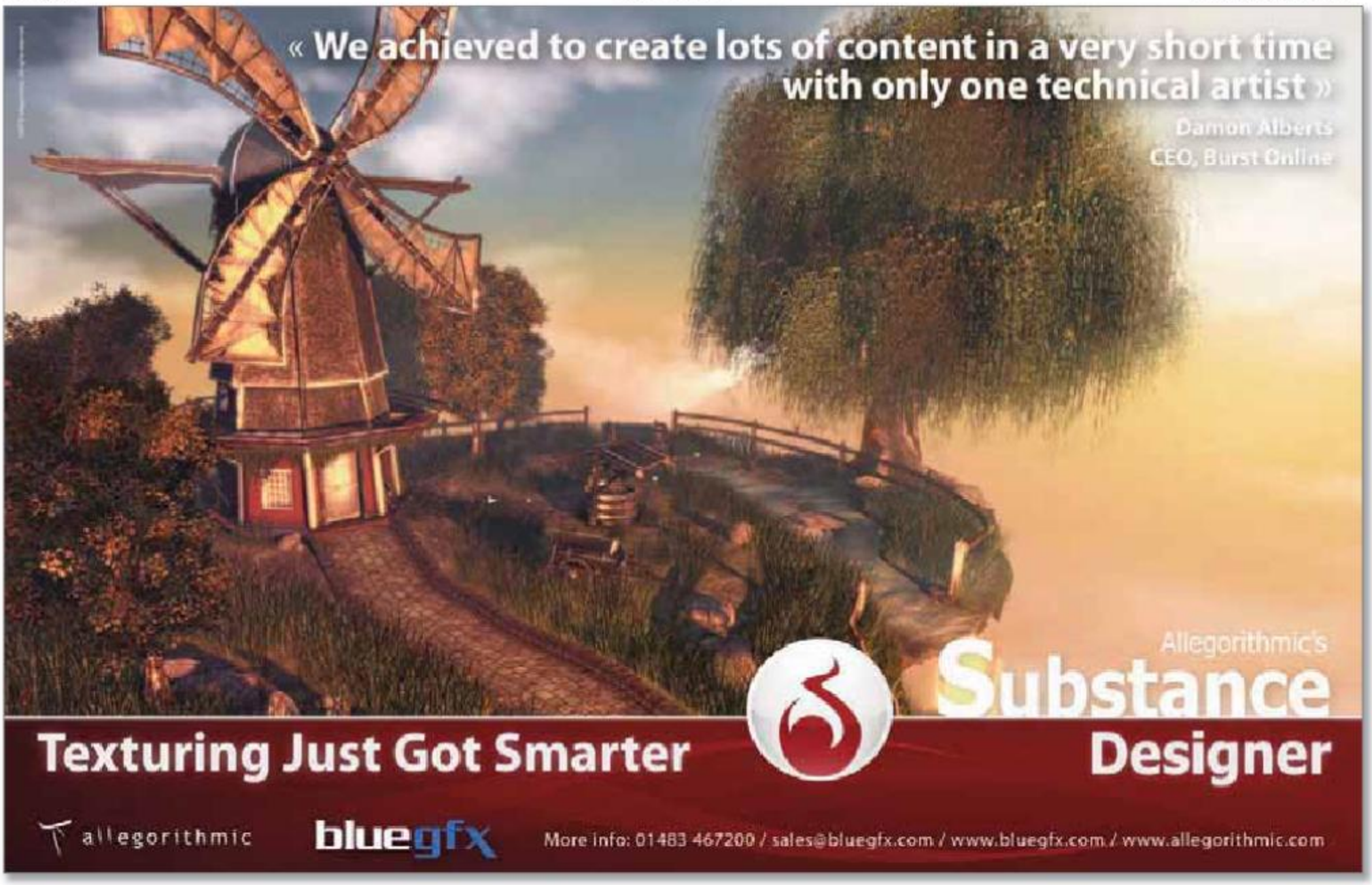
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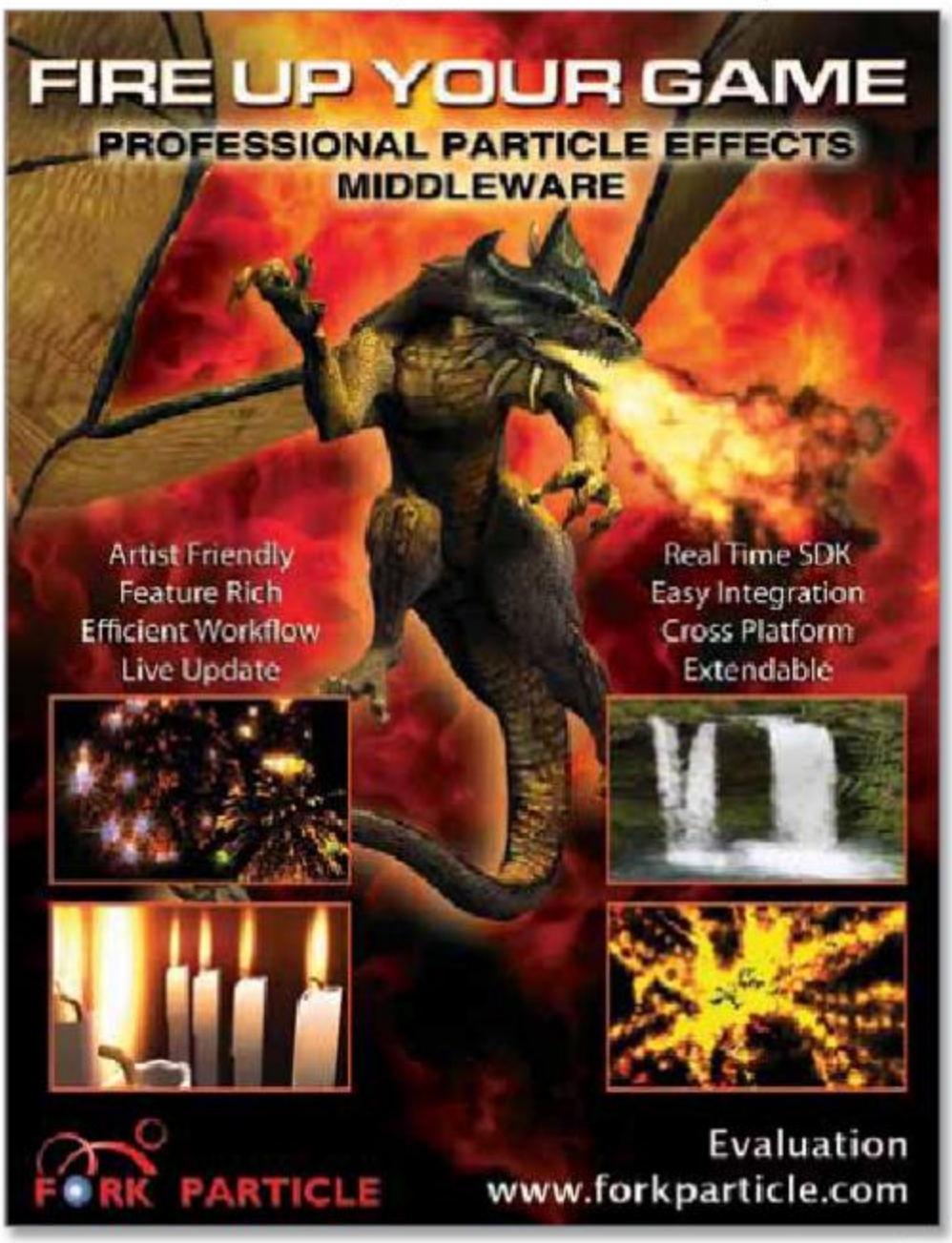

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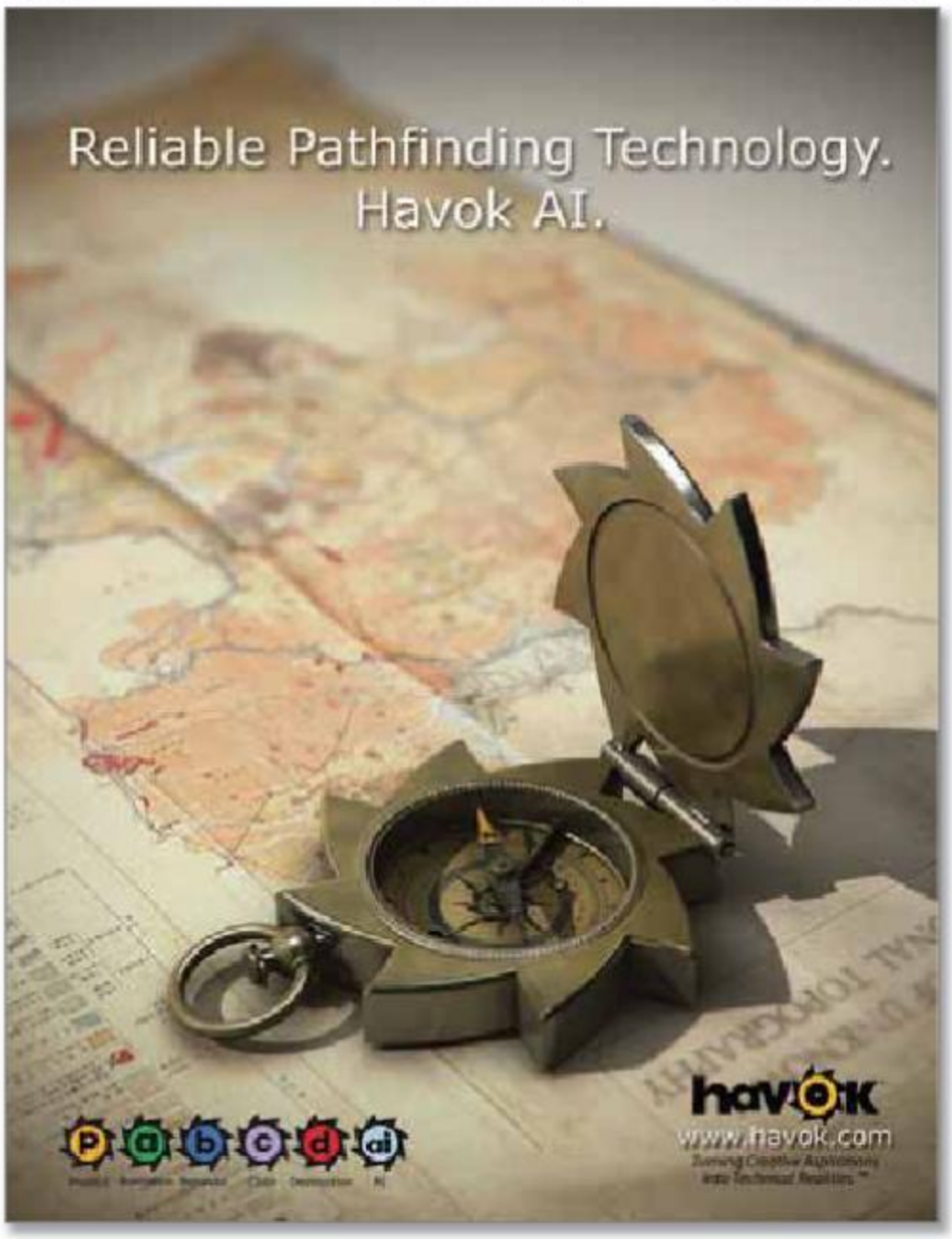

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Tool Spotlight

READY AT DAWN ENGINE

TECHNOLOGY: ENGINE

The Ready At Dawn Engine, a young engine announced in 2009, is a game development platform for consoles comprised of a flexible data-driven tool pipeline and a highly optimised engine capable of scaling up from handheld platforms to next-gen consoles. The platform contains integrated solutions for sound design, user interface and movie playback.

The engine tool pipeline and editing environment is the same for all consoles and allows the user to decide which consoles to output data onto. It also allows the production of separate assets for the different consoles, allowing the user to optimize each asset specifically.

Complete access to the source code of the tools pipeline and engine is also available. AI updates are distributed via the Perforce server which contains both a stable and an unstable branch of the source tree.

The engine also links to external console libraries provided as part of the dev kits for each console and a list of available libraries online.

A complete asset management system is provided, fully integrated into the editing system and backed by an SCM solution to allow for simple versioning of the entire game project, code, design and art. The editing tools also allow you to track asset usage and references inside the levels of a game.

The Ready At Dawn Engine provides a modular, task-driven and data-driven game engine. Ready At Dawn has stated its lack of faith in scripting languages and existing graphical representations, aiming instead we provide easy to use modules which can be combined inside its editing environment by designers and easily extended/modified by programmers to automatically generate new functionality inside the editor.

Having already powered the popular PSP *God of War* titles *Chains of Olympus* and the upcoming *Ghost of Sparta*, the engine has proved its mettle. As for the future, things are looking bright for Ready At Dawn, and they certainly seem ready for it.

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Services News

This month: Playspan and PayPal

Monetisation firm PlaySpan has hired Stevie Case as VP of sales and business development. In the role she will be responsible for generating new business leads as well as supporting the sales team on existing initiatives.

"Stevie is a widely respected figure in the gaming industry and she has a combination of passion, professionalism, and knowledge that is unmatched," said Karl Mehta, CEO of PlaySpan.

Case was keen to enthuse about her new position.

"It's great to be a part of PlaySpan's seasoned executive team and I am looking forward to contributing to the company's overall success," she said.

Case most recently served as the Senior Director of Business Development at LiveGamer. She was named by Working Woman Magazine as "20 Women to Watch in Business Under 30."

www.playspan.com

PayPal, the online payments firm, is launching new developer tools designed to streamline social games transactions. This will be followed by a micropayments feature next month.

Speaking to *Inside Facebook*, PayPal VP of product development Osama Bedier outlined the project's aims.

"We're going to have an online shopping experience where you can authorize a transaction on the screen right there in the game," he said.

The upcoming micropayments feature will allow gamers to pay smaller top-up fees in games instead of larger, one-time payments.

The firm is currently testing both development tool and micropayments feature with several studios, with plans to launch them at the Innovate Conference in San Francisco in October.

www.paypal.co.uk

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Services Spotlight

SPOV

Spov is a design and animation outsourcing company located in Shoreditch, East London. Serving the film, TV and video games industries, the firm has gained a reputation for high-quality animation output with a minimum of fuss.

Spov creative services include concept development and art direction, live action production and post production, motion graphics, branding, CGi and visual effects. The company has provided high-end animations and cut-scenes for games of the likes of *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*, *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen*, *Call of Duty: World at War*, *Quake Wars: Enemy Territory* and *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*.

The firm espouses a work ethic based around passion, good humour, and a dedication to produce compelling work that is original in concept and execution. It enthuses on a commitment to operate on an open, collaborative basis both in-house and in client relationships, and to bring a wealth of experience and enthusiasm from the design, animation, TV, film and gaming industries to its clients.

Upcoming Spov projects include the highly-anticipated *Call of Duty: Black Ops*, an as-yet-unannounced iPhone title slated by Spov as "the best iPhone game yet", two unannounced film opening sequences and a full-length animated feature.

In a recent interview with *Develop*, Spov's business development and strategy man Dan Higgott spoke about his belief in convergence as the future of the games industry as a whole, and something Spov would actively seek to be involved in.

"For Spov it seems an obvious area to focus on," he said.

"While the company has rightly gained a fantastic reputation for its games work over the last three years, it is important to remember that the creative team come from a film and TV background and have brought a narrative skill from these sectors into their games work.

"The next trick for Spov will be to take all of the learning that has come from its games projects back to film and TV, positioning itself at the heart of this convergence. It is personally exciting for me as I can see such potential for these two seperate media areas to learn from each other and develop in tandem, creating new immersive content and IP that can be fully passive, interactive or any point in between," he continued.

"For me, the technology is a facilitator, it will be story telling that will drive this convergence forward."

The company plans to launch a 2010 showreel soon. Until that time, playing through *MW2* and *COD: Black Ops* will tell us everything we need to know.

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Training News

This month: Train2Game, Skillset and Birmingham City University.

Online development training provider Train2Game has announced its Incubator programme, with which it hopes to provide its most talented graduates with a defined route into the video games development industry.

The new scheme will offer financial, logistical, business and mentoring support for successful candidates to establish their own businesses focused on the development of commercial gaming content.

A series of three-month long industry placements beginning in October will also be offered by the scheme, through which Train2Game will provide its graduates with time in-house at studios across the UK.

The programme is being led by Future Game and Digital City veteran Dave Sharp, who will manage the implementation of the £96,000 worth of support that each Incubator company will receive. This aid will include office space and equipment, hardware and software, business mentoring, IT and admin support and a monthly cash investment in the company.

Incubator candidates will be required to present a business cash flow forecast and creative proposition to the Train2Game panel before making it onto the scheme, and the first new company is sheduled to be in business by the early part of December.

"Train2Game's Incubator programme will act as a conduit for its most capable graduates to exercise their skills and creativity in a business environment which if successful will help springboard them into the UK games sector as business owners," said Train2Game director Clive Robert.

"We're really looking forward to working with these new companies, helping them bring some fresh new gaming content to market and setting them on track to becoming part of the games industry innovators of tomorrow."

www.train2game.com

Creative media training body Skillset has launched a new programme to highlight the top game education courses in the UK.

Game universities and courses that have passed Skillset's "rigorous accreditation process" will be awarded the Skillset Tick – a shorthand award to inform students and developers of the best UK courses.

Skillset's network of 24 media academies are the first to be awarded the Tick, as have some thirty courses in the UK covering the disciplines of animation, computer games, screenwriting and film production.

www.skillset.org

Birmingham City University will be hosting a four-week games development training camp for artists and coders from November 8th to December 3rd this year.

Run by former studio director at SEGA Racing Studio Guy Wilday, Gamer Camp: Nano will include a process of mentoring, support and coaching from gaming giants Blitz Games Studios, Codemasters and Rare with the aim of finding the next generation of talented gamemakers.

"The Gamer Camp programme is designed to provide graduates with a unique opportunity to get real 'hands on' experience of developing video games in a 'simulated' industry environment," said Wilday.

"After a week of intensive tuition the Nano course delegates are divided into teams which will then go onto develop unique iPhone games under the guidance and instruction of key industry figures. At the end of the course, the games are then submitted to the App Store for approval and availability worldwide."

12 people, eight programmers and four artists, will be given a place on the course.

"Having recruited a host of graduates over my career, I've found that their skills grow enormously as a direct result of working through a complete game development cycle," Wilday explained.

"The Gamer Camp programme is designed specifically to provide this experience."

www.bcu.ac.uk

The Big Picture

Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg got to grips with Nintendo's console when visiting the UKIE stand at the Liberal Democrat conference. We'd guess he was on the Everybody Votes channel, but as there's only a 'yes' or 'no' option, and no way to select 'flakey commitment to both sides', perhaps we're wrong. He should get on a game that uses the Balance Board.

REWIND

October 1990

20 years ago this month, things were simpler for developers...

■Nintendo contacts its licensees by written letter, as you did back then, to tell them they may make their own NES carts.

■Ron Gilbert's *The Secret of Monkey Island* reaches the public. Gilbert developed the game by writing his own short stories and sharing them with friends.

■The Commodore cartridge system C64GS appears at CES. *Zzap64* magazine touts it as the future of gaming. It wasn't.

■Sega's Project Mercury is released as the Game Gear in Japan. It's the third colour handheld, after the Atari Lynx and TurboExpress.

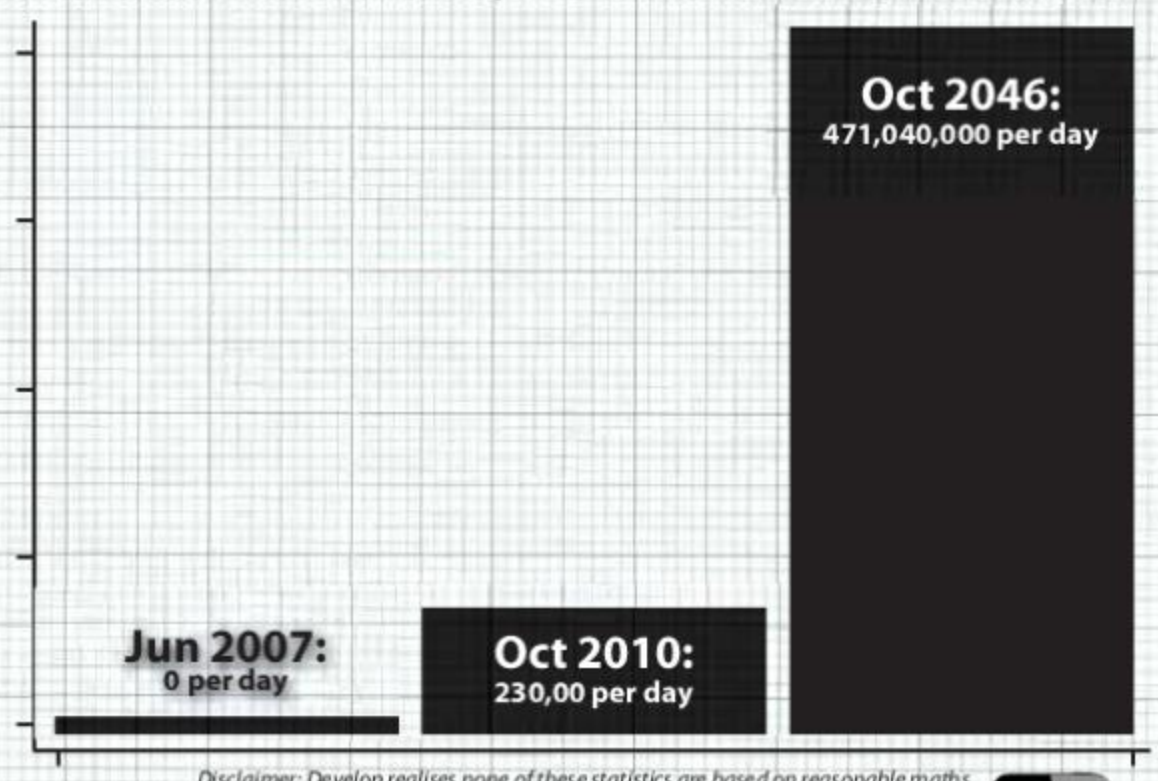
■The Mac Classic is released: the first Apple computer at under $1,000. For $999, you got 1MB of RAM to work with.

■The Internet Movie Database is launched.

Wrong Numbers

Stats can be misleading. Project the trends October's numbers suggest, for example, and the results show a misguided vision of the future

This month: Number of iPhone, iPod Touch and iPad devices activated



Disclaimer: Develop realises none of these statistics are based on reasonable maths

Activating 172 billion iPhone devices a year will no doubt provide a significant challenge for Apple, but the real test will be for developers. By the middle of the century there'll still only be a dozen good apps, and standing out will be a trillion times more difficult.

DEVIPEDIA

Dissecting the hyperbole of games development

Transmedia

Trans.med.ia

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What 'they' think it means:
Delivering narrative "simultaneously through numerous forms of media to give the audience a rounded understanding of the creative vision". Creating "multidirectional content" and "expanding on the game universe by embracing innovative methods and interweaving plot" through "complementary forms", including internet, books, comics.

What it really means:
Merchandise. Next time you hear about transmedia storytelling, it will likely be a publisher trying to dress up a range of branded extras as some future vision of the alternate reality game. Just because the latest mindless, over-hyped triple-A release has a mini series of crudley drawn comics and a DLC code hidden on the foot of an action figure doesn't mean it is pushing the boundaries of narrative.

develop FORWARD PLANNER

November 2010

Regional Focus: Canada
Our yearly look at the games dev firms operating in BC, Quebec and everywhere in between.

Events:
MIGS – November 8th to 9th, 2010

December 2010 /January 2011

Regional Focus: London Studios
Profiles of all the studios at the cutting edge of the English captial's bustling development scene.

Event:
GDC China – December 5th to 7th, 2010

February 2011

Recruitment Special
Our annual look at the jobs market includes: Advice for CVs, portfolios and interviews; per-discipline guidance on getting a promotion; the education sector; our salary survey; 30 Under 30 – the rising stars of games development; and much more.

Regional Focus: Cambridge
A look at current developments and new stories from the historic University Town.

Events:
DICE – February 9th to 11th, 2011
Casual Connect – February 8th to 10th, 2011

March 2011

QA & Localisation
The final phase of a game's production can be its most crucial step to global success – we talk to leading experts in testing, compliance and translation.

Regional Focus: West Coast USA
From Seattle to San Diego via Los Angeles and San Francisco, we examine Western game development's heartland.

Events:
GDC – February 28th to March 4th, 2011
Game Connection – March 1st to 3rd, 2011

April 2011

Mocap & Facial Animation
Every facet of character animation examined, from limb animation to lip-synching.

Regional Focus: Oxford
We examine the studios and technology companies in this key UK cluster.

May 2011

With *Develop 100* Insertion

Audio
Another look at the music and audio for the games sector, including in-house teams through to outsourcers.

Regional Focus: Scotland
Studios from start-ups to commercial powerhouses profiled.

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THE FAQ PAGE: Jane Jenson

Develop grills a respected figure from the global development sector…

Above: Jane Jensen can be found walking her bulldogs when she's not at work on her latest game

Who are you and what do you do?
I'm a computer game designer. I live in California and I've been designing games such as *Gabriel Knight* for about 20 years.

What are you working on right now, and what stage is the project at?
I'm working on *Gray Matter*, a large adventure game. It is getting close to final, with a scheduled release date of October.

Which aspect of it do you think will impress players the most?
The story is usually what people respond to the most in my games, the real-life locations and subject matter.

What was your first job in the industry – and what game did you first work on?
I wrote text and documentation for a *Police Quest* game. The first game I helped design was *Ecoquest: Search for Cetus*.

What was the first video game you played?
I played an old text adventure first – I think it was just called *Adventure*. My first graphic adventure was *King's Quest IV*.

What was the last game you played? Did you enjoy it?
Mystery Case Files: Dire Grove – I loved it.

What's your favourite game ever, and why?
I think I'd have to say *King's Quest IV* because it was the first game I'd ever played like that, and I was fascinated. I also miss being able to type in what you want to do and seeing the funny programmer responses. That was one of the last classic Sierra adventures that supported text.

How many hours a week do you get to spend playing games?
Not as much as I used to. Maybe six to eight.

What area of the industry needs more investment, be it of money or effort?
We need to broaden our audience and our reach. Everyone should spend some time playing games. It's a great mental exercise.

> ***"We need to broaden our audience and our reach. Everyone should spend some time playing games. It's a great mental exercise."***
>
> Jane Jensen, game designer

What do you enjoy most about working in the video game industry?
I get to work from home, which I love. I get to make up stories and playtest games. What's not to love?

Of all the games you have been involved with in the past, what has been your favourite, and why?
There have been great things about each of them, but probably my favourite is *Gabriel Knight 2* because it was a very cool, dark, erotic story and we worked with live actors on that one. It gave the project a whole other creative and social dynamic.

What websites do you visit most regularly?
Currently I'm hooked on a number of farming/homesteading and cooking blogs – blogs like Homestead Revival and the Barefoot Farmer. I also check abovetopsecret.com several times a day, and MSNBC and CNN are my news sites of choice.

What does your desk window view look like?
This:

What do you do in your spare time that isn't related to video games?
My husband and I have two English bulldogs and we walk them several times a day in a local preserve. I love hiking and being out in nature. I also do a lot of non-fiction reading on things like the climate, the future, economics.

What's your favourite book, movie or TV show, and album of all time?
My new favourite book is *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* by Barbara Kingsolver. Currently my favourite TV shows are *True Blood* and also *The Fabulous Beekman Boys*. Finally, my favourite album is *Dark Clad Company* by The Scarlet Furies.

Which other games developers do you most admire?
Steve Meretsky, Roberta Williams, Ron Gilbert.

What game would you most like to have worked on?
Heavy Rain.

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